

FOREWORD

To Gregory McCulloch's *The Life of the Mind* (Routledge 2003)

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At the time of his tragic death in December 2001, Greg McCulloch had completed the final version of *The Life of the Mind*, a book he had been working on, on and off, for almost twenty years. The book provides a synthesis of the ideas Greg had developed in his earlier three books, *The Game of the Name* (Oxford University Press 1989), *Using Sartre* (Routledge 1994) and *The Mind and its World* (Routledge 1995), and which also found expression in his various papers, notably 'Scientism, mind and meaning' (in *Subject, Thought and Context* edited by Philip Pettit and John McDowell Clarendon Press 1986). Greg's work had one large theme, which he approached from various directions, and expressed in different and distinctive ways. Broadly conceived, this theme is the intentionality of the mental: the fact that mental phenomena involve what Brentano called 'a direction upon an object' and what contemporary philosophers call 'aboutness'. Greg's long-standing interest in the theory of reference, in Frege's philosophy of language, in the theory of consciousness, in Sartrean and Heideggerian phenomenology and (his dominating concern) externalism, can all be seen as ways of addressing the question of intentionality.

In *The Life of the Mind* Greg approaches this theme via what he calls the 'demonic dilemma'. The dilemma is posed for anyone who believes in what he calls the 'ontological Real Distinction' between mind and world. Inspired by Descartes's doctrine of the Real Distinction between mind and body, Greg identifies the deep issue not as Descartes's dualism of two substances, but rather as the dualistic distinction between a self-contained mind and a mindless world, a distinction which is

preserved even by those philosophers who deny Descartes's own brand of dualism. A brief exposition of this argument may help readers new to this area to appreciate the character of Greg's thinking.

Suppose we assume the ontological Real Distinction as just outlined: in a certain sense, Mind and World are independent of each other. (To underline the fact that we are talking about theoretical, philosophers' notions of *mind* and *world*, I shall capitalise the initial letters of these words.) Then the question arises how we can make sense of the manifest fact of intentionality, the fact that mental states have content or representational character. We can locate intentionality on the Mind side of the distinction, or on the World side. But these two choices constitute the two horns of a dilemma. For if we locate intentionality on the Mind side, then the Mind is in itself intrinsically cut off from its world, and this makes intentionality utterly mysterious. This is the first horn of the dilemma. But if we locate the intentionality on the World side of the distinction, then there is no genuine content or subjectivity on the Mind side of things. This is the second horn.

The second horn of the dilemma is a hopeless position because the ontological Real Distinction conceives of the World in purely mechanistic causal terms, and (it is argued) no account of intentionality can be given in purely causal terms. Such an approach renders the subject something devoid of genuine subjectivity, 'a blank agency imprinted with causally efficacious traces of recoverable encounters with bits of its environment', as Greg put it in 'Scientism, mind and meaning'. In Greg's attack on the position expressed by the first horn, we see clearly the influence of John McDowell, whose demand that in theorising about the mental content, the 'life of the mind should not be made unrecognisable' could serve as an epigraph to this book. In the target of this part of Greg's argument are reductionists about mental content (like

Jerry Fodor or Ruth Garrett Millikan) as well as eliminative materialists like Paul and Patricia Churchland.

Since the second horn of the dilemma is so problematic, we might be tempted to locate intentionality on the Mind side. But this impales us on the first horn. The Mind, as conceived by the Real Distinction, is a repository of thoughts: it has its own special powers of intentionality, ‘signed and sealed, regardless of whether “its” world gets into the equation’ (Introduction, section 2). Greg argues that this picture – which is perhaps best exemplified in John Searle’s work – is unsustainable unless one accepts some contemporary analogue of the 17th Century ‘Idea idea’: the notion that the mind contains intrinsically representational states and events which are what they are regardless of how the rest of the world is. But it is argued that the Idea idea is fraught with problems, and gives us no adequate account of how genuine intentionality comes into being.

The upshot is that there can be no account of intentionality if we assume the Ontological Real Distinction. Greg’s solution is to abandon the Ontological Real Distinction, and embrace a radically *externalist* conception of the mind (outlined in chapter 2). To abandon the Ontological Real Distinction is to insist that there is not the divide between Mind and World created by Descartes and his contemporary materialist followers (who may nonetheless draw the significant dividing line between the brain and the world). The way to spell this out, according to Greg, is to develop an account of the phenomenology of mind, at the first-person and third-person levels. At the first-person level, this involves giving an account of what it’s like to have thoughts and experience (chapters 1 and 3); at the third-person level it involves giving an account of interpretation and our grasp of the minds of others (chapters 1 and 5). Greg argues that we will only begin to properly understand what he calls the

‘phenomenology of content’ if we have a correct conception of the subject as embodied (chapters 5 and 6) and if we approach the issue from the perspective of an *Epistemological Real Distinction* (chapter 4). That is, although Cartesians and others are wrong to assume the distinction between Mind and World that generates the Demonic Dilemma, there is nonetheless an important distinction between the ways in which we should *understand* our minds and the rest of the world (without, of course, denying that our minds are part of the world in an ordinary sense). A purely scientific understanding of the mind cannot be the right kind of understanding of embodied subjects and their thoughts.

The way of thinking of the mind developed in this book has many novel and distinctive features, but here I would like to draw attention to two. First, there is its brand of externalism. Externalism about mental content – the idea that intentional mental states are essentially individuated in terms of objects and properties external to the thinker’s body – is a fairly standard view in contemporary philosophy. The externalism of *The Life of the Mind* is radical, because it does not simply say that states of mind are relational states, with some inner, intrinsic component related essentially to some external factors. Rather, it attempts to give up this whole way of thinking in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic features of mind at all. Once we try and abstract any aspect of a subject’s subjectivity from its world – its embodiment in a ‘meaning-laden’ environment – then we are not left with anything which looks like subjectivity at all. This is the point of Greg’s attack in chapter 7 on the philosophical fantasy of a brain in a vat.

The second feature is the way the theory brings together the sensory and the cognitive. Again, the idea that the sensory aspects of the mind (perception and sensation) involve intentionality is something which many contemporary analytic

philosophers have come to appreciate in recent years. But Greg's account goes further than many such philosophers, rejecting any intrinsic, consciously available states of mind – the kind of states that a brain in a vat is alleged to have, on some views – and linking the third-person and first-person phenomenologies into a unified theory.

The Life of the Mind is written in Greg's characteristic punchy style, which for those who knew him will bring his philosophical character vividly to mind. In the Preface to his first book, he said that 'Philosophy flourishes best when people come together to cultivate the art and skills of good thinking: it degenerates into useless scholasticism, deservedly scorned by those in other walks of life, when its practitioners consider themselves to be the guardians and perpetrators of an over-arching and all-powerful body of doctrine.' Greg himself certainly cultivated the art and skills of good thinking. In keeping with his conception of the subject as a wholly embodied being, immersed in its world, Greg did not separate his philosophy from the rest of his life. He philosophised as energetically as he lived his life – with his whole being. For his friends and colleagues, this book serves as a worthy testament to his invigorating, iconoclastic and irrepressible philosophical presence. He will be greatly missed.

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