

Reviews

ARMSTRONG, D. M. and MALCOLM, NORMAN [1984]: *Consciousness and Causality*. Basil Blackwell. 222 pp. £17.50.

The aim of Blackwell's series of 'Great Debates in Philosophy', of which this is one of the first, is to have two well known proponents of opposing views outline their positions and attack each other's, and then reply to the criticisms, in order to 'capture the flavour of philosophical argument and to convey the excitement generated by the interplay of ideas'. The idea has obvious attractions, and the volumes could be very useful in teaching. In this book, though, something has gone wrong. The flavour of philosophical argument seems distinctly sour, and there isn't any interplay of ideas.

Norman Malcolm begins by stating his position. But his position is largely a series of attacks on other positions, none of which he formulates clearly enough that a student could see what the issues are. This is not surprising given that the Wittgensteinian view he is defending is essentially that there is a commonsensical understanding of mind imbedded in ordinary language, which cannot be presented as a general and explicit theory and which leads to confusion when one tries to make it theoretical or systematic. It follows that all one can do to achieve clarity is to point out other people's mistakes. It would have been better, then, to have had Armstrong's essay first, so that Malcolm had a single definite target to attack. Then it would have been clearer what his criticisms were aimed at and when they were fair.

Malcolm's exposition proceeds by first giving short parodies of views of Armstrong, Lewis, Nagel and others, and then producing examples to show that the descriptions these views would lead one to make of particular cases are wrong. This obviously depends on one's reactions to the cases. And it does so in a very delicate way, since the intuitions Malcolm needs are usually not intuitions about what is or could be true of a case described in a certain way, but what could intelligibly be said about it. Now it may once have been plausible in philosophy that people were more likely to agree about what makes sense than about what is true. But it is not at all obvious now. The evidence of the past thirty years is just the opposite: that you can often dismay your opponent with a solid argument whose conclusion is that what he says is false, but if you charge him with nonsense he nearly always has a reply.

The Malcolm/Armstrong debate is further evidence for this. Malcolm requires that the reader find it obvious that 'if a patient said that the pain was as *intense as ever* but that he didn't *mind* it anymore, then we should not understand what he is saying' (p. 12), that 'we know in advance that no

scientific discovery . . . could justify the attribution of those forms of consciousness [fear, anger, anxiety, anticipation] to flies' (p. 32), that 'it would have been nonsense for her to have said, "I was suddenly fully conscious but was not aware of it"' (p. 40), that 'it would make no sense to speak of *teaching* it [a sighted child] what seeing is' (p.54). I suspect that some of the assertions that Malcolm finds unintelligible may indeed be unintelligible. But in none of the cases crucial to his argument do I find it *obvious* that they are. And Malcolm's method seems not to provide him with any way of arguing to conclusions about meaning: one just has to agree or disagree.

From Malcolm's point of view, the diagnosis of what is going wrong here—in my reactions—would no doubt be that I have been so misled by taking seriously the kind of scientific theories that Armstrong and others take seriously that my reactions to simple English sentences have become warped. And something like that has indeed happened. But the fact that it has happened—not only to me but to a large proportion of the literate population—should be deeply disturbing to the whole enterprise of sorting out the concept of mind by simple reflection on what does and doesn't make sense. For as soon as one allows that it is possible for such intuitions to be shaped by one's beliefs then one must face difficult questions about which of one's intuitions about intelligibility have been shaped by which of one's beliefs. And it becomes extremely unlikely that there can be any neutral consensus about intelligibility, unaffected by disagreements over what is true.

Armstrong's philosophy of mind is certainly shaped by science. In his section of the book he repeats essentially the materialistic functionalism familiar from other works (including the essays in *The Nature of Mind*, which are at the right level for undergraduates), giving particular emphasis to his views on introspection and on the causal connections between states of mind, perception and behaviour. These are indeed the points of greatest contrast with Malcolm's position, and at moments there is even a glimmering of a real debate on these points. The 'Cartesian' quality of Armstrong's materialism becomes clearer, under pressure from Malcolm: states of mind are objective features of people, ultimately states of their brains, and as such enter into causal relations with more tangible things and with each other. Among the causal relations with each other are some in which a person's states modify his beliefs more or less directly, not via speech or action, so that the person knows 'introspectively' what he wants or thinks or is likely to do. Malcolm has two lines of attack on this. One is based on claims of the unintelligibility of some of the consequences of Armstrong's views. I have already said why I do not think these can succeed. The other is potentially more promising. He argues that the notion of causation is radically and indefinitely ambiguous, so that there is no single relation holding between all the items which Armstrong wants it to relate. Armstrong begins his reply to this objection by arguing that Malcolm's examples to support his claim

can all be taken as showing a multiplicity of ways in which the causal relation can be known, rather than a multiplicity of relations. He then weakens the point somewhat by wavering between various analyses of cause, leaving the reader somewhat in the dark what the single objective relation he has in mind is.

I think Malcolm has a point here. The ordinary English 'cause' is notoriously slippery and context-dependent. A complete materialism should indicate how it, too, can be reduced to or replaced by a predicate in the language of physical theory. Not that this would be easy to do. Malcolm curiously misses an opportunity here. In his reply to Armstrong he seems to admit the intelligibility of the vocabulary of 'states' in terms of which Armstrong's theory is expressed. One would imagine that this is the notion above all whose intelligibility, as picking out a single objective class of items, Malcolm ought to challenge in order to press his attack, both on the causal theory of mind and on the univocality of 'cause'. I think what is going on here is that Armstrong has in spite of himself been affected by the theories of the past forty years, and has quite unwittingly developed a capacity to understand this particular theory-laden term.

Both Malcolm and Armstrong discuss recent work on the qualitative character of experience. Malcolm takes these developments simply as sliding back into the old mistaken view that there are discriminable feelings or sensations which always accompany mental life. He thus gives essentially the same old replies: that if one can respond and make visual discriminations one can see, and if one can use 'see' normally one knows what it is like to see. ('The idea that anything I see must "look somehow" to me, suggests that we are in sense-datum country.') Now this is an important challenge to such ideas, and deserves more of a reply than I can give here. Writers such as Shoemaker and Block are certainly aware that their views can be taken in this way, and certainly wish them to seem different. The gist of what they say seems to be that when *e.g.* one is in pain one's pain has various qualities, some of which (piercing or throbbing, for example) correspond to familiar adjectives, and many of which do not. There is normally a character to one's pain, then, which is not the same either as the fact just that one is in pain or that some particular adjectives partly characterise it, and it is this that is the qualitative content of one's pain. Now this does seem like the kind of view Malcolm would think was terribly wrong, but it is not at all clear that it is the *same* as various other terribly wrong views; it seems to be neither the myth of the given nor the myth of feelings of will and thought.

Armstrong thinks he has to disarm a threat to his theory from the existence of experiential properties. It is not clear to me exactly what the threat is. I think it is that in taking a perceived object to be green we are attributing a property to it, but not the primary quality that is the basis of its objective greenness, and so there seem to be in the mind properties which cannot be defined in terms of causal relations to objective states. I would have thought that the way to disarm this would be to work on the idea of

someone's attributing-in-perception a property, which has certain characteristics. This does not seem to entail that there *is* a property with such characteristics, but just that the person is in a state whose content involves a second-order quantification which is not actually satisfied. Armstrong does not take this line, though, but rather develops a picture of experiential qualities as existing and being primary qualities taken as parts of various wholes, in relation to particular other qualities. He does this very diffidently, leaving an impression of open-minded candour but also surely putting student readers in some danger of confusion about what the problem he is facing is and what his response really comes to.

I have referred several times to my doubts about the use students could make of the book. This is because the main appeal is surely as a teaching aid. The hints both authors make of points going beyond their well known published works are not enough, and not developed enough, to make it a substantial contribution to the philosophy of mind in its own right. But as an instructive and entertaining confrontation it might have been a valuable book. It isn't. There is one important issue which the book illustrates very clearly and usefully, though. That is the centrality of questions about the role of theory, either scientific or prescientific, in our understanding of mind. Both writers, quite rightly, end their main contribution with an emphasis on this aspect of their disagreement. Armstrong says simply that we cannot avoid theories so we might as well choose to base our philosophies on the best ones. Malcolm says something that seems to me extraordinary. He says that philosophers who take mental predicates to apply on the basis of, or to be, states of the nervous system, have forgotten the simple truth that it is whole living people that are the bearers of these properties. And this is, I suspect, the motivating idea behind many of his objections. But it is a simple misunderstanding. Compare: it is surely whole living people that have anginas, but this is surely compatible with the truth that an angina is a condition of one's heart.

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BLOOR, D. [1984]: *Wittgenstein. A Social Theory of Knowledge*. Macmillan. xi + 213 pp. Hardback £15.00; paperback £5.95.

The aim of Bloor's book is to show that Wittgenstein's thought is relevant to the empirical study of society. He sometimes expresses this by saying that sociologists can carry Wittgenstein's thought beyond the point at which he himself stopped, the implication being that he stopped before he should have, or at least, that he was practising a form of sociology which other sociologists should continue. Bloor's reason for saying this is that Wittgenstein gave what Bloor terms a naturalistic account of meaning, logic