



Vincent Descombes

THE MIND'S
PROVISIONS

A Critique of
Cognitivism

Translated by Stephen Adam Schwartz

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VINCENTDESCOMBES brings together an astonishingly large body of philosophical and anthropological thought to present a thoroughgoing critique of contemporary cognitivism and to develop a powerful new philosophy of the mind.

Beginning with a critical examination of American cognitivism and French structuralism, Descombes launches a more general critique of all philosophies that view the mind in strictly causal terms and suppose that the brain—and not the person—thinks. Providing a broad historical perspective, Descombes draws surprising links between cognitivism and earlier anthropological projects, such as Lévi-Strauss's work on the symbolic status of myths. He identifies as incoherent both the belief that mental states are detached from the world and the idea that states of mind are brain states; these assumptions beg the question of the relation between mind and brain.

(CONTINUED FROM FRONT FLAP)

In place of cognitivism, Descombes offers an anthropologically based theory of mind that emphasizes the mind's collective nature. Drawing on Wittgenstein, he maintains that mental acts are properly attributed to the person, not the brain, and that states of mind, far from being detached from the world, require a historical and cultural context for their very intelligibility.

Available in English for the first time, this is the most outstanding work of one of France's finest contemporary philosophers. It provides a much-needed link between the continental and Anglo-American traditions, and its impact will extend beyond philosophy to anthropology, psychology, critical theory, and French studies.

Vincent Descombes is the author of *Modern French Philosophy, Objects of All Sorts: A Philosophical Grammar*, *Proust: Philosophy of the Novel*, and *The Barometer of Modern Reason: On the Philosophies of Current Events*. Stephen Adam Schwartz, who teaches in the Department of French, University College Dublin, translated Descombes's *The Barometer of Modern Reason*.

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The Mind's Provisions



NEW FRENCH THOUGHT

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NEW FRENCH THOUGHT

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<i>Translator's Introduction: The Complete Holist</i>	xi
CHAPTER 1	
The Phenomena of Mind	1
1.1. <i>What is the place of the mental in the world? Common sense cannot decide: in ordinary usage, the adjective "mental" does not apply only to the subject's immanent activities, but may also be used to qualify anything dependent on intellectual competence—a book, for example, which is a mental commodity.</i>	2
1.2. <i>Philosophy of mind becomes a mental philosophy when the mind is defined as a sphere detached from the external world, a sphere for which a place must be found in the order of things.</i>	9
1.3. <i>Classification of the phenomenologies of mind: mental phenomena can be conceived as given to everyone (exteriority) or only to the subject (interiority); they can be conceived as indirect manifestations of mind (symptoms) or as direct manifestations (criteria, expressions).</i>	11
1.4. <i>The philosophy of consciousness detaches mind from the world by contrasting our indirect knowledge of events in the world with our infallible direct knowledge of mental events.</i>	14
1.5. <i>Theories of the unconscious contest the identification of the mental and the conscious, but maintain the dissociation between the representational mind and the world. Theories of mental causes extend the philosophy of representational mind into a third-person psychology.</i>	17
1.6. <i>The philosophy of intention does not define intentionality as a special relation between subject and object, but as an order of meaning imposed on a material.</i>	19
CHAPTER 2	
Two Sciences?	30
2.1. <i>In the nineteenth century, the project for the scientific study of the human mind led to a debate regarding the unity of method in the sciences.</i>	30

2.2. <i>The hermeneutic dualism of explanation through laws, on the one hand, and the understanding of meaning, on the other, today takes the form of a conflict between two philosophies of action: the causal theory of action and the intentionalist conception.</i>	32
2.3. <i>The traditional opposition between explanation and understanding rests on a positivist philosophy of naturalistic explanation, one conceived as an explanation by means of laws, i.e., observed regularities.</i>	35
2.4. <i>Laws conceived as general propositions have no explicative power. In order for explanation to take place, the regularly observed link between two kinds of phenomena must correspond to a real connection.</i>	39
2.5. <i>Not every teleological explanation is an intentional explanation: thus, the functional explanation of a natural system makes no reference to intention.</i>	42
CHAPTER 3	
The Anthropological Investigation of the Mind	47
3.1. <i>Structural anthropology is the project of explaining (the variety of) human institutions by (common) intellectual structures.</i>	47
3.2. <i>Lévi-Strauss sees structural explanation as a way of overcoming the opposition between explanation of social phenomena by means of consciousness, on the one hand, and explanation by historical circumstances, on the other. The social totality has a rational meaning because it can be given (in the mind) before its parts.</i>	51
3.3. <i>According to Lévi-Strauss, the holism of the social should be based on a theory of the structural unconscious. However, a naturalistic psychology cannot account for symbolic systems.</i>	54
3.4. <i>According to another brand of structural explanation (that of Louis Dumont), the opposition between voluntarist and historical explanation can be overcome by an understanding based in the radical comparison between our culture and other cultures.</i>	58
CHAPTER 4	
The New Mental Philosophy	66
4.1. <i>According to cognitivism, the model provided by the computer makes it possible for a naturalistic psychology to study intellectual activities.</i>	66

4.2. <i>The materialism of contemporary mental philosophy is in fact a dualism for which the subject of mental operations is the brain.</i>	69
4.3. <i>The new mental philosophy advances three theses: (1) that mental life consists of a sequence of mental states; (2) that these mental states can be redescribed as brain states; and, (3) that the behavior of a subject is the effect of an interaction among internal mental causes.</i>	73
Note on the Concept of Metaphysics	78
CHAPTER 5	
The Doctrines of Psychological Materialism	84
5.1. <i>Ordinary psychological explanations apply no theory to events.</i>	84
5.2. <i>The notion of a "folk psychological theory" is confused.</i>	87
5.3. <i>There is a real theory of the art of influencing people's behavior by giving them good reasons to act: rhetoric.</i>	90
5.4. <i>Explanation by means of psychical causes seems magical: representations are held effectively to act. According to some causalist theorists, the action of representations would be conceivable if representations were material. In order to establish a scientific psychology, "psychical matter" (Lacan) would have to be identified.</i>	93
5.5. <i>However, when material signs act, they do so in virtue of their physical properties rather than in virtue of their meaning.</i>	97
5.6. <i>The hypothesis of a symbolic effectiveness of myths (Lévi-Strauss) prefigures the cognitivist conception, by postulating an intermediary level of material mind, between the intentional and the organic; at this level, symbols are held to act like physical forms.</i>	102
CHAPTER 6	
The Psychology of Computers	108
6.1. <i>The Turing test, which is meant to establish the intellectual capacities of machines, proves nothing unless one posits that, in principle, agents exhibiting the same abilities really belong to the same class of equivalents, after we have abstracted from their origins and material makeup.</i>	110
6.2. <i>The comparison between human and artificial intelligence requires a human operator who follows explicit rules.</i>	115
6.3. <i>A subject cannot be given rules to follow unless he has certain primitive practical skills: explanation stops where</i>	

	<i>action must begin (Wittgenstein); the end point of practical reasoning is the starting point for action (Aristotle).</i>	121
	<i>6.4. Certain objections raised about the functional classification of intelligent agents are grounded in a deficient conception of the nature of systems. A simple assemblage devoid of organization, like Searle's "Chinese Room," has no behavior of its own, so that the question of its intelligence does not arise.</i>	127
CHAPTER 7		
	The Inside and the Outside	135
	<i>7.1. In psychology, functional explanation accounts for the structure of an animate system's behavior in a complex environment. The psychological theory called "causal functionalism" has nothing to do with structural analysis and therefore puts forward no real functional explanations.</i>	135
	<i>7.2. The "sciences of the artificial" (Herbert Simon) are in fact the sciences of (natural or manufactured) systems considered from the perspective of their adaptive abilities.</i>	141
	<i>7.3. Functional explanation is holistic: when it studies the functions of the parts of a whole from the perspective of the rational conduct of this whole in its outer environment, it abstracts from the internal structure of those parts.</i>	148
	<i>7.4. Psychology is a science of the artificial because its object—the behavior of animate systems—is not studied as an effect of the structures of its inner environment, but as a response of the behaving systems to the complexity of their outer environments.</i>	152
	<i>The condition of mind is neither interiority, nor subjectivity, nor calculating power, but rather, autonomy in determining the goals it undertakes.</i>	158
CHAPTER 8		
	Mechanical Mind	164
	<i>8.1. The analogy with the computer is meant to mediate between physical processes (whose explanation is causal) and mental processes (whose explanation is intentional). This mediation is to be found in the idea that the computer carries out a calculation, in the sense of a rational transformation of physical formulas.</i>	165
	<i>8.2. The idea of a calculation is held to resolve the two major difficulties for any mechanical theory of mind: what might be called the "Brentano problem" (how can physical events be explained by their intentional content?) and the "Sherlock Holmes problem" (how can a mechanical sequence</i>	

- of mental states also be a chain of reasoning?*) 167
- 8.3. *Every mechanical theory of internal mental representations must demonstrate that it does not require an intelligent mechanism (a homunculus) to manipulate those representations according to their representational content.* 171
- 8.4. *First defense of mechanical psychology: through the breakdown of intellectual work into ever more simple operations. Yet, the need for a homunculus was the result not of the difficulty of cognitive operations but of their intentionality* 174
- 8.5. *Second defense: through the redescription of intellectual work as mechanical calculation, thus as physical work. But the physical work described is brain work, so that the brain then becomes the subject of mental operations (dualism of the brain and the body).* 178
- 8.6. *A person's activities cannot be described outside of a narrative context. This principle of intelligibility, which is found in Wittgenstein's work, was recognized by the Aristotelian tradition ("actions are attributed to concrete subjects"). This is the principle that allows us to understand why dualisms of the soul (whether spiritual or material) and the body are doomed to incoherence.* 182

CHAPTER 9

Cerebroscopic Exercises 189

If beliefs and desires were states of a person's brain, we would in principle have to be able to determine what someone believes or desires by examining the state of his brain. This proposition appears to be incoherent.

CHAPTER 10

The Metaphysics of Mental States 200

Mental philosophy borrows its concept of a state from the metaphysics of the natural sciences. A state is an internal condition of something at a given time. This condition is independent of both the state of the world outside the thing and the thing's past. In order to conform to this metaphysics, states of mind must be redefined as the "narrow states" of a solipsistic psychology.

CHAPTER 11

The Detachment of the Mind 212

According to its defenders, mentalist psychology is legitimately solipsistic. For them, psychological explanation must detach mind from the world, for what matters is the content of the

subject's mind, not the real state of the world. This is what the psychology of the computer-mind does: it detaches thought by defining it as formal calculation. This defense of methodological solipsism fails to account for the moment of appearances: the Cartesian subject who has suspended judgment continues to encounter appearances.

CHAPTER 12

The Historical Conditions of Meaning	224
12.1. <i>The notion of a mental state detached from every context is incomprehensible. Thoughts have their content in the context of a historical tradition of institutions and customs.</i>	224
12.2. <i>Anthropological holism of the mental does not contradict the "principle of supervenience" according to which there can be no mental difference without a physical difference. Indeed, the very notion of supervenience implies a recognition of a difference in order between the states posited by a physical description, and the meaning provided by an intentional description.</i>	229
12.3. <i>In what case are two people thinking the same thing and in what case are they thinking something different? Mental atomism proposes to identify thoughts through individuation: it assumes that thoughts can be counted one-by-one, as physical images might be counted. For its part, mental holism will have to explain how it plans to identify thoughts without individuating them: it will have to provide an identity criterion for thoughts.</i>	236
<i>Notes</i>	249
<i>Works Cited</i>	273
<i>Index</i>	279

Translator's Introduction

The Complete Holist

IT IS FAIR to say that, in the English-speaking world, modern or contemporary French philosophy is always preceded by its reputation. Yet the content of this reputation depends on the prospective audience. Among specialists in most areas of the humanities, the reputation is a sterling one. Modern French philosophy is known in advance to be radical, transgressive, opening the constrained concerns of philosophy to philosophy's "Other": the "noise" or "violence" that philosophy purportedly excludes.¹ Radicality is clearly—and perhaps paradoxically—a core value in the English-speaking humanities today, and modern French philosophy is revered for having initiated many of those working in the humanities in the ways of radical thought. Yet among philosophers in the English-language tradition, modern French philosophy has a poor reputation at best and *for the very reasons it is venerated in the rest of the humanities*: its radicality, which is seen at worst as a kind of eccentricity, another manifestation of what the French themselves call "the French exception." At best, modern French philosophy is thought of as an individualistic endeavor focused on the endless and ever more radical and idiosyncratic reinterpretation of the philosophical tradition, an endeavor that rarely if ever takes the form of a collective project with real aims and some concrete achievements in the way that analytic philosophy so often does.²

There is no doubt some truth and error in both views. One is nevertheless entitled to wonder which modern French philosophers each group has in mind. Both groups, it would seem, think of modern French philosophy as synonymous with a skeptical and irrationalist current that unquestionably predominated during most of the twentieth century. This is the current that could be said to originate in Pascal and to have taken as its watchword his famous claim that "the heart has its reasons which reason knows not." This self-styled liberatory current is one that sees reason (even in the minimal sense of the simple avoidance of contradiction) as both limited and limiting and therefore as something to be thrown off, overturned, or simply gotten beyond. It includes the ways of thinking associated with French Romanticism and Symbolism, Bergson, and the two waves of twentieth-century French thinkers inspired by Heidegger and Nietzsche. For these latter thinkers, one of the primordial facts of human existence is that rea-

son is a form of alienation or estrangement from the true functioning of the world by which it is conditioned: this is implicit in the idea, for example, that, to the extent that they are rational, all of our concepts might be false and inadequate to a world which is fundamentally contradictory. The first of these waves in the 1930s and 1940s included not only existentialists like Sartre and Jean Beaufret who explicitly acknowledged their debt to Heidegger, but also thinkers like Alexandre Kojève, best known for an interpretation of Hegel that drew much from Heidegger. This wave also included difficult-to-classify thinkers like Maurice Blanchot and Georges Bataille, who drew much from both Heidegger and Nietzsche. The second wave of Nietzscheo-Heideggerianism is perhaps the one most closely associated with modern French philosophy and is characterized, broadly, by a willingness to see everything—concepts, desires, beliefs, duties, etcetera—as, at root, relations of force, whether mechanical or not, and, therefore, once again, as contradiction. It includes the major structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers of the 1960s and 1970s: Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, and Lacan (a philosopher *honoris causa*, as Descombes once referred to him³), among others.

There is, of course, another tradition of French philosophy that tends to be neglected when the subject of discussion is modern French philosophy: the tradition of rationalism that runs from Descartes through the thinkers of the Enlightenment (Voltaire, Diderot) to the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century neo-Kantians (Renouvier, Brunschvicg). The success of the twentieth-century neo-Hegelian, Heideggerian, and Nietzschean critiques of Kant and rationalism in general did have as a result that this current became less conspicuous (which often means it retreated into French universities) and certainly less visible in the English-speaking world. Yet, recently, it has undergone a minor resurgence, with a “return to Kant,” for example, being advocated by French philosophers like Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut.⁴

Vincent Descombes is certainly a stern critic of the irrationalist bent in French philosophy in its Nietzschean, decisionist, and poststructuralist guises. But he is no straightforward rationalist. He is probably still best known in the English-speaking world for *Modern French Philosophy* (1980), his masterful survey of the then-dominant irrationalist line running from the discovery (or revival) of “the three H’s” (Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger) in the 1930s to that of the three “masters of suspicion” (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud) in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵ Indeed, the thinkers discussed in that book—Kojève, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Lacan, Serres, Foucault, Althusser, Derrida, Deleuze, and Lyotard—are those that most people think of when the subject turns to modern or contemporary French philosophy. However, in its original French form, Descombes’s book was called *Le même et l’autre: Quarante-cinq ans de philosophie française (1933–1978)*

(The Same and the Other: Forty-Five Years of French Philosophy [1933–1978]). There is in the French title an acknowledgment of the historical limitations of the survey that is not present in the English title, where the philosophers covered could be misconstrued as embodying modern French philosophy as such. Indeed, in the English-speaking world, the philosophers discussed in Descombes's book and their preoccupations *have* come to be taken as synonymous with modern or contemporary French philosophy as such. This is so despite the fact that almost twenty-five years have passed since the end of the period covered in the book and that almost all of the philosophers in question (Derrida and Serres being the exceptions) are no longer with us.

Yet French philosophy has continued and, indeed, flourished in the years since 1978. Those years have been marked by a return to themes and topics that had been neglected or abandoned during the years in which the skeptical, irrationalist, and antihumanist tradition predominated. French philosophy today is as diverse as at any time in its history, as readers familiar with the other titles in the New French Thought series will be aware. Most striking about its recent evolution is that, alongside the various resuscitations carried out through the typically French immanentist move of the "return to" (not just the "return to Kant" but, for example, the recent revival of Husserl), there has been a veritable explosion of interest since 1978 in what is called, for want of a better term, analytic philosophy. After almost fifty years of almost unqualified philosophical—indeed, *a priori*—skepticism concluding in philosophy's own impotence and obsolescence, the question of what philosophy is capable of has recently come to underlie many of the efforts in the field. Where, for prior generations, philosophy was often presented as a hopeless (yet inevitable) undertaking, always rewriting and reworking itself while awaiting its own "overcoming," for current French philosophers, the question of what philosophy can do is not one that can be declared to have been answered in advance. One actually has to see what can be done, to see whether previously "insoluble" paradoxes, contradictions, and conundrums can be resolved rather than simply highlighted. Doing so has, for many, involved abandoning the "grand style" of the "master thinker" equipped with "transcendental arguments" for why, say, conceptuality is nothing but "relations of power" or why human communication is ultimately impossible. "In the face of skepticism," as the title of a recent French book describes the current situation,⁶ what has replaced these kinds of negative speculative declarations in the work of thinkers like Jacques Bouveresse, Christiane Chauviré, François Recanati, Pascal Engel, and others working in the analytic tradition is a form of what Descombes calls "elementary critique," one that "asks us not to understand any more than we are capable of explaining and applying in some way."⁷ For this way of doing philosophy, paradox

and contradiction may well be where philosophy begins; they cannot be where it ends. This requires the embrace and revival of a certain form of rationality, although, in the case of Vincent Descombes at least, such rationality is more broadly and anthropologically defined (in terms akin to those of Baudelaire) as one in which there is "a legitimate and mysterious reason for all customs"⁸ and where the justification by means of tradition proper to many cultures can be as rational as the justification by appeal to rules of argument.⁹ Indeed, Descombes is what could be called an "anthropological rationalist": one who differs from other varieties of rationalist by placing ways of life in the anthropological sense (and the hierarchies of status they entail) at the center of what reason and thought are. This also entails a certain self-limitation of the field of the philosopher's competence.

It is certainly not my intention to write a sequel to *Modern French Philosophy* here. However, if one were to write such a sequel with the aim of covering developments in the years since 1978, it is certain that one would have to include a chapter on Vincent Descombes himself. For Descombes is quite simply among the most brilliant and original philosophers working anywhere in the world today. His work is encyclopedic in its scope, profound in its implications, and systematic in its ambitions. Descombes works broadly in the field of what could be called "the philosophy of society," but the necessity for such a catchall phrase highlights the wide range of his concerns. From the workings of language and society to the role and possibilities of the social sciences to the philosophy of political judgment to aesthetics and the philosophy of literature, Descombes seems to take an interest in everything. But he is no dilettante, and his contributions to each of these fields are at once extraordinarily insightful and refreshingly modest.

Modesty and circumspection are certainly not qualities often associated with French philosophy. By calling his contributions "modest" I do not mean to suggest that Descombes's claims are simply incremental adjustments to work already in place or positions already established. Modesty here consists in eschewing the assumption—one that is virtually constitutive of the modern conception of what it means to be a philosopher on the continent—that originality and, yes, truth are always and only the result of a rush to extremes or a radicalization of thought.¹⁰ In Descombes's case, the modesty of his claims and of his very language can also be seen to be of philosophical import. By refusing grandiloquence and writing in a straightforward and often witty manner, Descombes has taken a position against one form of solipsism. For is not a grandiloquent style, as Clément Rosset maintains, one that bypasses the real, attempting to render the real "by words that have clearly lost every relationship with it,"¹¹ enclosing itself in its own verbiage and thereby confirming the solipsistic hypotheses

it so often serves to present? Conversely, does not the refusal of grandiloquence already make the point that the meaning of words is not something yet to be discovered but must be the meaning that they have publicly? In other words, linguistic meaning—and, in Descombes's view, meaning of all kind—is not something determined, let alone decided or discovered, by each of us individually (Humpty Dumpty: "My words can mean whatever I want them to mean"), but necessarily a product of rules and institutions that are, by definition, collective or, more specifically, common. One who believes and argues precisely this, as Descombes does, will seek to present his arguments in as generous and clear a way as possible. Descombes once responded to the question of what meaning "philosophy" has for him by writing:

It would . . . appear legitimate that I should be asked *what meaning philosophy has for me*. And yet I have no intention of replying to a question put in this way. I am in no way disposed to concern myself about some meaning that the word "philosophy" might have especially for me, or even that it might in any case have for me, whether it had the same sense for others or not. This would be to accept my own responsibility for "giving a meaning to it," as they say; whereas I maintain, rightly or wrongly and certainly until I see proof to the contrary, that the meaning, for me, of the word "philosophy" is exactly the meaning which it ought to have for everyone. There is nothing extravagant in itself about such a claim: it is only a way of saying that I myself wish to understand the word "philosophy" in the sense that it should have for everyone. . . . Hence the question "what sense does it have for me?" is ambiguous. If this sense refers to the meaning of the word, it is not so much my business to give it as to discover it in order to conform to it.¹²

A recurring theme in much of his work is accordingly what he has called "the paradox of precarious communication."¹³ This paradox is, as Descombes points out, the inopportune consequence of any number of theories in the philosophy of language and mind, and not just French ones. It is therefore a possible beginning for elementary critique. Indeed, this paradox would seem to be a consequence of both the version of semantic holism presented (and criticized) by Jerry Fodor and Ernest LePore in *Holism: A Shopper's Guide* and of what would appear to be its opposite, for example, the solipsism that one finds expressed throughout Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* and that Descombes has analyzed masterfully in his book on that author.¹⁴ If holism—the idea that signs, for example, only have meaning given the entire system in which they function—entails the rejection of atomism, "the idea that a language might be constituted by providing a sign for one thing, then another sign for another thing, and so on,"¹⁵ then it would seem that

the meaning of a sentence pronounced or written by an individual depends on the meaning of the other sentences that this individual has produced or could have produced. Something that is materially the same sentence could not have the same meaning when pronounced by different mouths, unless all the other sentences produced by the two speakers were also identical.¹⁶

It would follow from this that "ordinary facts of communication begin to take on the appearance of improbable events, perhaps even miracles."¹⁷ Furthermore, to the extent that mental semantics is also holistic, the very possibility of a psychology would seem to be in jeopardy, since we could never identify anyone's beliefs, desires, etcetera. The solipsistic view of meaning arrives at a similar result in a different way, maintaining that, in order to speak, each of us must translate our personal representations into a common language and, in order to understand, we must translate that public language back into our idiolect. Proust expresses this throughout the *Recherche* in statements like: "Man is the being who cannot take leave of himself, who only knows others within himself and who is lying when he says differently."¹⁸ In this view, one never really communicates one's thought because thought is irretrievably private, while the means for its expression are incommensurate because public. It follows that interpretation is not only unavoidable and ubiquitous but utterly inadequate. This is by no means a point of view unique to literary figures, and one finds it, as Descombes points out, among any number of reputable philosophers in both the continental and analytic traditions.¹⁹

Finding a way to rescue the banal yet mysterious fact of human communication and, indeed, the very possibility of a psychology from these opposing perils—i.e., to understand them—has been part of Descombes's project for over twenty years now. It is in many ways the theme of the book you are about to read and its as yet untranslated sequel, *Les institutions du sens* (The Institutions of Meaning). The two volumes in fact form a whole, to which Descombes has given the collective title *Les disputes de l'esprit* (The Mind Debates), although *The Mind's Provisions* can certainly be read independently of the later volume. This volume is, first and foremost, a critique of the solipsistic and causalist position in the philosophy of mind. More specifically, it is a critique of cognitivism, the latest philosophical incarnation of the project for a "scientific psychology." Cognitivism is here taken to task for the Cartesian "detachment of the mind" from the world that it requires in order to think of the mind in causal and mechanical terms by taking the computer as its model. The second volume is correspondingly a defense of holism against the charges made by many that it necessarily renders the identification of thought (and thereby also communication) precarious. Carrying out that defense will involve coming up with criteria for the identification of thoughts that do not rely, as Des-

combes claims the cognitivist's criteria do, on a metaphysics of states of mind (as representations) that has been illegitimately imported from a naturalistic metaphysics of states of things. For representations or significations (in the sense of signifieds, not signifiers) can no more be picked out and identified or enumerated one-by-one in the mind than they can in, say, a painting. As Descombes argues, "it is quite impossible to say how many significations or representations there are" in, for example, a figurative painting like *The Raft of the Medusa* because the concept of a signification "manifests no identity criterion" (p. 241 below).

Descombes calls the doctrine that he defends in this book and its sequel "anthropological holism" or "structural holism." As the first of these names implies, this is not merely a position in semantics or the philosophy of mind but something much broader. It is essentially the view, derived from Wittgenstein, that meaning of any kind (and therefore thought) inheres first and foremost in a whole network of practices, institutions, mores, and "forms of life": in a word, a set of normative rules. This is a holistic position because it maintains that meaning is only given in a totality rather than in a one-to-one relation between a representation and its object. It is anthropological, not because it would seek to engage in properly anthropological work that is better left to the anthropologists themselves, but because the totality in question is one made up of the human institutions and practices that anthropologists study. And it differs from the sort of semantic holism discussed and criticized by Fodor and LePore in that it does not merely hold that meaning is the sort of thing that "if anything has [it] *lots* of other things must have [it] too."²⁰ It maintains this, of course, but adds a further qualification: lots of other things must have it and *there must be an order* among those things, a set of internal relations that gives them their meaning. The concept of an order, of a structure of relations and, above all, *rules* (in the normative rather than the mechanical and causal sense), is thus crucial, and broadens the considerations of the philosophy of mind into a philosophy of society, renewing a sociological and anthropological tradition leading from Montesquieu through Durkheim to Louis Dumont. Descombes seeks to provide this tradition with a philosophical undergirding by means of an explicit concept of what he calls, following Hegel, *objective mind*, or, following Montesquieu, an *esprit des lois*.

Anthropological holism is also historical: over and against the solipsistic positions of cognitivist philosophers like Jerry Fodor, who maintains that thoughts may be identified as brain states without regard for the world in which they take place (for example, that two subjects who are physically identical "down to the last molecule" have the same thoughts regardless of their past histories), Descombes insists upon what he calls the "principle of narrative intelligibility": "psychological attribution imposes a historical

context: a particular past must have taken place, a particular future must be conceivable. Barring which, the present attribution is quite simply inconceivable" (p. 183 below).²¹ In other words, thoughts can only be determined in a historical context and only attributed to appropriate entities within those contexts. If I remember my appointment at the bank, I must inhabit a context where there are banks and appointments and I must have made such an appointment; if I remember going to the seashore, it cannot logically be claimed that my brain remembers it any more than it can be claimed that my hand is writing a letter to my sister (see sections 8.5 and 8.6 below). In making this claim, for which he argues brilliantly, Descombes revives a long-standing tradition in scholastic philosophy running from Aristotle through Thomas Aquinas to more modern thinkers like Leibniz to much more recent philosophers like Gilbert Ryle, according to which it is a category mistake (an error in "philosophical grammar," as a Wittgensteinian might put it) to attribute actions to parts rather than to individuals. To the extent that this "intentionalist" line of thinking for which Descombes argues also subsumes the philosophy of mind within the philosophy of action, it follows that thought as well is properly attributed to persons, not brains.

The Mind's Provisions is certainly focused on positions and debates within the analytic tradition of the philosophy of mind. This might come as something of a surprise for readers who know Descombes only through *Modern French Philosophy* and who might be led to conclude that the concerns of so-called "continental thought" no longer interest him. And it is true that in France, Descombes has a reputation for being an analytic philosopher, although in the French context this is an entirely relative term. Yet one of the many merits of this book, one that sets it apart from most other works in the philosophy of mind, is its constant contextualization of the debates with which it engages. Descombes continually reminds us that many of the ideas—and indeed the underlying metaphysics—of contemporary cognitivists were not born with the computer but have a long heritage; that, for example, the project for a scientific psychology has roots in Mill's nineteenth-century associationism or that the "representational theory of mind" has been with us since Descartes (as its chief proponent, Jerry Fodor, is also ready to admit). In the course of *The Mind's Provisions*, Descombes will also remind us of both antecedents and correctives to the positions of his opponents in the current debate: in Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, in Leibniz, in the nineteenth-century debate about the specificity of the social sciences, in Lévi-Strauss's notion of a "symbolic effectiveness of myths," in Lacan's notion of "psychical causality," and even in the works of Alexandre Dumas. But this is not simply a matter, as some have maintained, of rendering complex and often technical debates

in analytic philosophy palatable for a French audience. Nor is it simply a matter of enriching a debate that otherwise risks being too abstract or scholastic (in the pejorative sense of the term). Here again, to insist on such contextualization—to do philosophy in this way—is to take an implicitly philosophical position.

Philosophical activity produces critical effects in that it confronts mere opinions with a rational ideal. This ideal must in turn assert itself in the discussion, failing which it would remain a prejudice. But such an ideal can never be a consequence of discussion; indeed, we have just used it in a positive definition of the latter. It remains to define it as a purely formal *a priori*: the ideal of rationality is the pure form of discussion, that is to say the whole set of rules of free debate.²²

Consider the way in which analytic philosophy is often conducted. For many, this style of debate is held to be exemplary in its rationality, and in just the way suggested by the above passage. There is certainly much to be said in its favor. The world of analytic philosophy is seemingly a purely intersubjective one, not unlike a discussion club where communication is unconstrained and where any and all are able to contribute arguments and refutations. Yet, as Descombes points out, this “free discussion presupposes collective silence; it is a social relation in which the social aspect has been neutralized.”²³ It is important to note that Descombes’s point here is not that of the irrationalist scorning the barbarity and violence on which such civilized institutions purportedly rest. Descombes is here making a sociological point about the “naivety” of seeing social relations as purely intersubjective relations but also, perhaps more importantly, a political point about the futility of upholding such intersubjective relations as the model for what a society should be and for how political judgment should be exercised (as Jürgen Habermas’s notion of “communicational rationality” can be said to do). A human society cannot be a discussion club, precisely because such a club is predicated on the evacuation of all relations of subordination (of priorities, of ends) “so that only the purely rational subordination of ‘particular’ to ‘general,’ of ‘consequence’ to ‘principle’ and of ‘theorem’ to ‘axiom’ remains.”²⁴ The very existence of such a discussion club presupposes those social relations: “the emergence of societies permitting free discussion is never itself the consequence of such discussion, and . . . their peaceful operation implies a world outside, one in which social relations are not those of free discussion held in a context of collective silence.”²⁵ Yet the intersubjective model for the way to do philosophy—whatever the branch of philosophy in question—can lead to the illusion that the world is but a discussion club and humans nothing but its participants, pure minds devoid of any particular status or aims in the world:

Mental philosophy [which is what Descombes calls the theory of mind detached from the world] is, in a sense, a psychology, but a psychology of beings who never display anything even resembling *psychic life*. Animation—the specific behavior of an animal system in its environment—is not its concern. It is instead concerned with representation, a phenomenon of presence to mind [p. 10 below]

For Descombes, this “encroachment of cognition upon the entirety of psychic life” [p. 127 below] is the result of a similar severing of the mind from society: “if the philosophical speculations on the origin and structure of psychological concepts became aberrant, it is because it was thought possible to cut mind off from society.”²⁶ In the face of this, he insists that “the psychology of intellectual functions must take on the problem posed by institutions that are properly intellectual, by cultural styles of thought, and by techniques for reflection and meditation. It will have to be a *historical psychology*” (p. 157 below).

To see philosophy as rooted in the here and now and divorced from its own history—which is always the danger for philosophy in the analytic style, though one avoided by its best practitioners—is also to cut mind off from society. It is to treat that history (i.e., how we got here) as inconsequential, in much the same way that modern science does. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that one of the dominant perspectives on the mind in the analytic tradition is one that maintains that a brain struck by lightning so that its molecules were scrambled into the same configuration as my brain when I am thinking “I must go to the bank” would also be thinking “I must go to the bank” even if the brain in question belonged to a cave-man. The point here is that just as “I must go to the bank” requires an entire narrative context that includes banks, rules governing our interactions with them, and any number of other things in order to be a meaningful utterance, so too does philosophical discourse require its own narrative context for its intelligibility. This is both a stance and a style of doing philosophy that is highly original: neither strictly an immanentist illumination of problems in the history of philosophy for their own sake (or for the sake of a simple radicalized “return to”) nor a set of claims and positions detached from every historical mooring.²⁷ There is a consonance of aims, positions, methods, and, yes, style in Descombes’s work that makes it almost seamless, indeed: complete, whole.

It is important, however, to forestall a potential source of misapprehension. Descombes’s holism must be distinguished from two alternative pictures of objective mind—of the human mind in its relation to the (social and historical) *norms of thought*—that differ around the following question, one which has been crucial in the social sciences: “Do the agents know what they are doing?”

On the one hand, there are all of those theories that treat the agents' own understandings of their actions (including their verbal and mental actions)—their *reasons* and the rules governing their thinking and acting—as mere epiphenomena of deeper *causes*, whether internal or external. For these theories, the agents ultimately do not know what they are doing, and the reasons for their thoughts and actions are something other than what they think they are. One might class among these theories the Freudian “scientific psychological” theory of the unconscious (internal) or the Marxist theory of the economic base (external). One might also put in this category the externalist theories of French structuralists, who also put forward a version of holism (since, for them, it is the system that provides its elements with their meaning). But theirs is a “causal holism” strongly criticized by Descombes for having “taken the rules of an intellectual activity for mental causes” and “the structures of the mind for psychical mechanisms.”²⁸ In this regard, the cognitivist position, one which is both solipsistic and causalist, is, as Descombes shows, an unlikely bedfellow for French structuralism and, especially, the Freudian (and Lacanian) project for an internal “scientific psychology.” Cognitivism’s Cartesian solipsistic principle, which frequently takes the computer as a model for mind (so that it makes no difference whether the computer-mind is installed in a robot-body or not; see chapter II below), also requires that we accept that humans know not what they do in the world, incapable as they are of escaping their own representations. Cognitivism’s causal principle asks us then to believe that they themselves are not doing and thinking what they are doing and thinking: their brains are. These theories would seem to have the advantage of collapsing the social sciences into the natural sciences, allowing us, the third parties, to uncover the causal laws governing human behavior but at the price of having us inhabit a fundamentally mysterious world, one in which we are mere puppets of forces that exceed us.

On the other hand, there are rationalist, intentionalist, and individualistic theories (including those of dialogical rationalists) that see the shared rules governing thought and action as the result of a freely given consensus, that see, for example, social rules as an amalgamation of individual intentions to which we, collectively, assent. Here again the model of the discussion club asserts itself. This view rescues the actor’s self-consciousness, but at the price of a false, voluntarist picture of institutions as the work of one or several Legislators. “By this view,” Descombes writes, “we imagine a group of *orators* who, in a spirit of free deliberation, pronounce *eloquent speeches* for the consideration of the *assembled people*.” He then asks: “But where did the orators learn the art of rhetoric? Who taught them to speak? How was the assembly convened? How was the matter for debate decided upon?”²⁹ Any picture of institutions as the work of

Legislators must be a false one, because it presupposes at least some of the institutions it is meant to explain.

Descombes's position differs from these in that it thinks of the normative conditions on action and thought as kinds of grammatical constraints that are not unknown to the actors. These constraints are to be uncovered by what he calls, following Wittgenstein, "philosophical grammar."³⁰ He shares with the structuralists and also philosophers in the English-speaking tradition like Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge³¹ their externalism, the view that the locus of meaning is outside, in the world and not in the individual's head, while fleshing out this theory with a properly anthropological and humanistic conception of how meaning is instantiated as objective mind. Yet grammatical constraints and normative rules are different from the rules the structuralists hoped to uncover in that they are explicit norms and not occult rules in the natural scientific sense, i.e., "principles of functioning" that we would have to uncover.³² He shares with the rationalists the view that individuals act and think and that the reasons they give for what they do are not delusional: "The voluntarist explanation at least has the virtue of taking into account the fact that the institution exhibits a meaning in the eyes of those whose institution it is, and that it must therefore be comprehensible" (p. 58 below) But he differs with them in his refusal to see objective mind as merely an accretion (i.e., as intersubjective) or as anything other than primordial.

It should be clear, in any case, that Descombes's work marks, if not a revolution (the practice of proclaiming a revolutionary break having itself been broken with in recent French philosophy), a profound transformation in the aims and procedures of French philosophy, one that can fruitfully enter into dialogue not only with philosophers in the English-speaking traditions but with those in the English-speaking humanities whose point of reference is French structuralism and its aftermath. Will this dialogue occur? If an individual "wants to communicate his thought to anyone at all, he will have to accomplish an act of discourse and, thus, establish a social relation of interlocution."³³ If the conditions for this cross-cultural social relation of interlocution—not least between French thought and its English and American counterparts—show signs of having finally been put in place, it will no doubt be in large measure thanks to the mediation of Vincent Descombes.

The Mind's Provisions

The Phenomena of Mind

The mental commodity, like any other,
indispensable, maintains its price.

—MALLARMÉ, *Variations on a Subject*

THE PHENOMENA of mind are also called mental phenomena. The question in what follows will not be whether there are such phenomena but rather where they are to be located.

That there are mental phenomena is not an empirical thesis in need of support. It is simply a question of definition. “Phenomenon” here means whatever may contradict our speculations and lead us to correct our initial descriptions. There are phenomena if there are facts that could result in the overthrow of even the most entrenched dogmas or in the rejection of the conclusions of even the soundest line of reasoning. “Phenomenon” certainly does not mean: what it is that will reveal to me what I am talking about at any given moment. What I am talking about is something I must have already understood or decided. Rather, phenomena are what I must inspect in order to know more or in order to discover anything at all about the things I want to talk about. If this is how we understand mental phenomena, the question of their existence need never be raised. Even those who utterly reject the idea that the mind is distinct from the brain or who maintain that the mental itself is merely a hypostatized entity do not go so far as to contest the difference between a pebble and, say, a high-school senior. They have no difficulty accepting that the difference between these things is manifested by various phenomena that can be examined. The difference is neither a speculative hypothesis that one might choose not to embrace nor a result that needs to be established by some sort of special investigation. No special acuity or methodical research is required in order to recognize this difference.

But the fact that there are, incontestably, mental phenomena in no way suggests that there is agreement about the correct way to understand them. In fact, the question of mind is the epitome of a contested philosophical problem. For there is indeed a point that cannot be decided simply by

examining how things in fact happen, a point the determination of which cannot be exempted from philosophical disputes: the way in which to express and account for the difference between a pebble and a high-school senior. What should be emphasized? What sorts of distinctions should be drawn between things that are held to have a mind and things that are not? The entire debate regarding the phenomena of the mind bears in fact on the conception of these phenomena and preeminently on their place in a macrocosmic system.

The words “phenomena of mind” inevitably call to mind the illustrious tradition of the phenomenologies of mind, of which the most famous is that put forth by Hegel in his work by that name. And, in many ways, it is precisely the question of a phenomenology of mind that will be asked in what follows, provided that the phenomenology of mind is seen as an attempt to understand mind as it manifests itself. As it manifests itself: but where does mind manifest itself and how does it do so? In a person’s innermost soul in a private form that is difficult to communicate? Or, rather, within public space and, therefore, in a historical and social form?

Every philosophy of mind must begin as a “phenomenology of mind” in at least one sense: we expect such a philosophy to tell us where we can find its chosen subject. “Where do you locate the mind?” is a question asked of philosophers who refer to the mental. There have traditionally been two responses: within or without. Within, according to the mentalist heirs of Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Maine de Biran and among whom one can also place the phenomenologists and the cognitivists. Without, according to the philosophers of objective mind and the public use of signs, for example, Peirce and Wittgenstein. I have two aims in this book. First, to support the thesis of the externality of mind: mind must be located outside, in exchanges among people, rather than inside, in the internal flux of representations. Second, to comprehend the difference between these two responses from the point of view of the moral sciences or *Geisteswissenschaften* [*sciences de l’esprit*].¹ Doing so will require a reassessment of the debates surrounding the human sciences that have persisted for a century: hermeneutics versus positivism, the philosophy of the subject versus structuralism, methodological individualism versus the holism of the mental. I believe that these debates must not be limited to methodological questions but should instead be considered ways of putting a philosophical conception of mind to the test in the terrain of anthropology.

1.1. *Mental Things*

The mental commodity: when Mallarmé uses this somewhat unusual expression, it is understood that he is referring to books.² The poet relates that he had just taken a morning walk in the streets of Paris. This allowed

him to ascertain that the public had not stopped reading, contrary to the rumor then circulating that there had been a "crash" in the book trade. In bookshop displays, merchandise meant to nourish the mind was displayed in abundance. The price of the mental commodity had not collapsed.

Is it only an audacious stylistic turn of phrase that allows the adjective "mental" to be associated here with voluminous and heavy things, the books that the booksellers pile into columns resembling, according to Mallarmé, the architecture of a bazaar? At first glance, Mallarmé's expression seems to match his intentions perfectly: it seems self-explanatory and requires nothing in the way of annotations. Yet, if one is to believe the proponents of "cognitivism," the most recent philosophy of mind, a book could not be described as a mental thing. This new philosophy of mind is a kind of *mentalism*. According to the explanations offered by its adherents, mentalism consists in the rejection of behaviorist psychology, which sought to explain the behavior of people without appeal to their mental life, that is, without attributing to them a mind lodged somewhere between the stimulations provided by the world and the responses of the organism. In the eyes of a mentalist philosopher, the mental commodity cannot, strictly speaking, be a book, because that is something given outside of human heads. Rather, it would have to be the set of operations concerning the book that must have been carried out in the author's head or the set of those by which the reader will come to know it. After all, they point out, books do not write or read themselves. Without customers, a bookstore risks bankruptcy. The case of the book itself is even more serious: without readers, this book is nothing more than a stack of paper stained with printer's ink. These sheets do not become the pages of a book until they happen to be represented as such in the mind of a reader.

It might well seem that the new mentalism thus supports the so-called "philosophy of the subject" (or of the *cogito*), which has always maintained, contrary to the various prophets of the "death of the author" or the "end of man," that books do indeed have authors and readers. There are no books unless they are books for subjects, and precisely in virtue of this subordinate relationship. The confidence of the philosopher of the subject on this point has proven to be unshakable: if you tell him that a book exists, he assures you that *at least* one subject exists, namely the person who wrote the book. The philosopher of the subject is certain to have the public's approval on this, even in situations where that public dare not admit it, having been intimidated by the vociferous "critiques of the subject."

Like the philosopher of the subject, the mentalist also believes that books—and signs in general—have a subordinate mental status: the book would contain neither language nor meaning if these things did not exist in someone's head. The attribute of mentality belongs first and foremost to what happens inside someone and only secondarily to what happens

outside: words, gestures, and written signs. For such a philosopher, "mental" is a synonym of "intrinsically meaningful," precisely because this word refers to whatever it is inside us that allows a meaning to be attached to external things which are otherwise devoid of meaning, like the sounds of a voice or the traces of a pen on paper. In order to be intrinsically mental or meaningful, the phenomena of mind must be internal and not external. They must be sought inside people and not in the world.

Yet it would be a mistake for the philosopher of the subject to hastily assume that the mentalist's position bolsters his own. For the mental operations located within a person should not necessarily be held to belong to a subject, at least in the strict sense in which philosophers define the term "subject" as the origin of our meaningful utterances, that is, as the person who can claim recognition as their author and say, "I and I alone am speaking." The new breed of mentalists—the cognitivists—differ from most of their predecessors in their adherence to a strict materialist doctrine. They make clear from the outset that, in their eyes, mental life is a physical process and that the mind that they seek to reestablish over and against behaviorism is a material system: quite simply, the brain. The new philosophy of mind, like the associationism that preceded it, sees itself as a mental mechanics. What keeps these new mentalists from calling a book a "mental thing" is not that a book is too material, physically heavy, ponderous, and subject to various kinds of physical deterioration. All of this, in their eyes, is just as true of the mind: it has a certain weight, it takes up space in the cranial cavity, it is vulnerable to excessively violent shocks and other deleterious actions. In fact, for these philosophers, the only reason that the merchandise for sale in the bookstore cannot be literally described as "mental" is that it is located on shelves and in displays and not inside people's heads. So it is that, in their view, a division has been established: if what you are looking for is mental, you must seek it inside the skull. If, on the other hand, the object of your inquiry is outside the head, it is also external to mental life. The motivation behind this division is that, as long as the book remains outside of me, it can tell me nothing. In order for it to become thoughts for me to ponder or information from which I might benefit, the bookish commodity must first literally become a mental one. The intelligible content of the book must be detached from its material support in the printed pages and transferred, so to speak, into an internal support: that is, into a support that is sufficiently close to me that it can be said that I have *come to know* what the book says. Thus the new mentalist, who presents himself as the partisan of a doctrine called "cognitivism," will point out that I cannot claim to know what a book says if my relation to it amounts to nothing more than having bought it at the bookstore and placed it on my bookshelf. As long as the book has not passed, partially or entirely, into my memory, it is not sufficiently close to me to

enter into my mental operations. The mere possession of a book does not allow one to answer questions about its content or to conduct oneself according to its teaching. One is here reminded of the old but still pregnant image of the zealous reader who goes so far as to literally devour the sacred text in order to be all the more certain of carrying it in his heart and not just in his baggage. Had it even the slightest cognitive merit, this sort of transfer by physical incorporation would be a conventional way of reading books. If a student could succeed brilliantly in his exams simply by eating his crib notes rather than by committing them to memory, then eating a textbook would be an acceptable variety of the cognitive transfer known as "memorization." In order for a cognitive transfer to take place, we are told, the key is that a thing laden with meaning—a cognitive entity, a representation—be transported to a point within the person where it can play an effective role in the control of his conduct.

The new mentalists, particularly the theorists attached to the cognitivist program, would deem the preceding considerations mere platitudes hardly worth mentioning at all but for the fact that powerful anti-mentalist prejudices have for a long time been widespread not only among the scientific public but also among the philosophical public under the influence of thinkers like Wittgenstein and Ryle. I cannot agree with them on this point. There is nothing banal or obvious in any of this. The idea that the mental must be something internal to a person is hardly a basic and obvious fact. Rather, it is an exacting thesis. To accept this thesis, we would have to modify profoundly our ordinary conceptions and ways of speaking. I assume that, for a neo-mentalist, the expression "mental commodity" could be applied to things that might be put on the market such as information, knowledge, techniques of calculation, and software programs. When the expression is applied to a book, it can only be through a figure of speech, since a book only has mental or semantic properties in a derivative way. Such a figure works through an expansion of the applications of a vocabulary that refers first and foremost to the mind itself. We are expected to concede that we *know*, through the science of physiology, that the mind is located in the brain and that we must conclude, according to this philosophy, that the mind is thus identical to the brain, unless we are prepared to admit that two active powers can effectively occupy the exact same place.

Notice, however, that all of the vocabulary of semantic verbs applies equally well to books and other such products of the mind. It is easy to imagine a librarian helping us in our research by pointing to different books in his department and saying: this book *upholds* such and such a proposition, this book *professes* such and such a doctrine, here is another book that *shows* that the first is in error, here is a book that *refutes* all of the others on the shelf. It might be claimed that, in this case, the vocabulary has been transferred from its original field of application to a second-

ary one. Indeed, it may well be that our understanding of these semantic verbs takes place in a derivative way: when we say that a book upholds a doctrine, it may just be a way of saying that the author of the book upholds the doctrine. But, in such case, the derivation would go from persons to books. The primary use of these verbs would be to say, when standing before Raphael's painting of the School of Athens: "This is the philosopher who upheld such and such a doctrine while this one over here sought to refute him." By contrast, it does not seem at all possible to apply these same verbs not to people but to *brains*. One cannot say: This brain *professes* the Platonic doctrine but has been *refuted* by this other brain. Such attempts to apply semantic language directly to brains must be immediately counterbalanced by a change in the application of the substantive "brain" so as to mean "person" rather than an organic part of a person. Moreover, it is worth noting that the same thing would be true of the direct application of such verbs to minds. "I am the mind that always negates": we understand that it is Mephisto who always negates and not simply a material or immaterial part of his person.³

Such considerations of vocabulary are of course incapable of establishing anything from a philosophical point of view. We may well find we have excellent reasons for reforming our ordinary ways of speaking and may even decide to treat the brain henceforth as a subject to which we can attribute the cognitive properties that had hitherto been reserved for people. But to do so would be a major philosophical revision and not a simple return to common sense.

Another way to take stock of the conceptual revision recommended by mentalists is to consider in a more direct way the location of mental operations. We have no trouble admitting that knowledge of the contents of a book is to be located in the person who has read the book and not in the book itself sitting on the library shelf. Imagine, for example, that we belong to a team of explorers following the instructions given in a book written in an ancient language and that only one member of our team has proven able to read this book. The most important thing for our team would not be to know where the book is at any given moment but to know the whereabouts of our colleague who has understood its meaning and remembered the directions it gives. Our knowledge of the contents of the book moves with our colleague and not with the book itself. In other words, to the extent that the group's knowledge of the book's contents is located anywhere, it is located in the space occupied by our associate who has read it rather than wherever the book happens to be. If we were somehow to maintain possession of the book after having lost our knowledgeable companion, we would also have lost our knowledge of the book. Yet the reverse is not true: to lose the book is not to lose the knowledge, as long as our colleague remains with us. Thus, knowledge of information that is avail-

able somewhere is itself available somewhere, in another place, namely, in the knowing subject and, if one insists, "in his head." In general terms, the place in which signs are actualized is not the place of their intellection (or of what Peirce called their "interpretant").

Up to now, the role played by the topographical precision that locates a given mental resource "in so-and-so's head" has been perfectly clear, since we have only been discussing ways of referring to the person who can give us the information we seek. Yet we should bear in mind that, rather than being a mental operation, knowledge is the condition of such operations. Thus it is that the knowledge of the meaning of the book can be contained "in our colleague's head," while the answers to our questions—for which this knowledge is the condition of possibility—can be given neither "in his head" nor, for that matter, "in our heads" by some sort of inexplicable telepathy. Rather, those answers are given through intelligible communication between him and us and thus take place wherever we happen to be at the time. What is more, the knowledge that our colleague possesses is the result of his having read the book. This is another operation, one which would seem to take place wherever it was that he read the book—the National Library, for example—and not inside his head. The knowledge about the book travels along with the person who has assimilated its content, but the activity of reading the book must take place wherever the book happens to be. If the book is moved, the act of reading it must move with it.

These observations are obviously not sufficient to clear up the disputed point. My aim in making them has only been to point out the special nature of questions of place when they are asked regarding the mental. It may well be that topographical and chronological qualifications have a different status depending on whether they are applied to physical facts or to mental ones. The question "where is X located?" may well change its meaning depending on whether it bears on the location of a book or of a mental commodity: in the latter case, we will have to distinguish between the performance of the act of reading and the competence of the reader who has understood what he has read. Yet in any case, the mentalist view is a *thesis* and not a reminder of something incontestable. This thesis holds that *the operation of reading a book takes place in one's head* and not on the surface of the work itself, because only the text *represented* as a meaningful text can be what is read, and representations have their place in the head.

Texts written on paper do not compose themselves. But the new mentalist philosophy argues that the situation is quite different for the text composed in one's head. It could well be the case that this "mental" text has composed itself in the mind in reaction to an impulsion by the various subsystems or "modules" that make up the author's mental organ. This

happens in the mind and therefore, we are given to understand, in the brain, since that is the only place within the subject that we can imagine locating the mind. This is why philosophers who uphold the idea that books are written by their authors will have more or less the same reaction to the new mentalism that they did to the doctrine once called "structuralism."⁴ The only difference to their eyes is that the previous critical doctrine sought to dispossess the author of his status as author of the work in favor of a whole or system of which the individual person whose name graces the book would be little more than the executing agent or amanuensis (whether this whole be a *Zeitgeist*, an "epistemè," or some sort of "ideological apparatus"). By contrast, the new mentalism transfers authorhood from the whole of the person to a part thereof. In this view, the production of a book, like any mental activity, consists in a set of mental processes by which representations are transformed or combined, without this being, strictly speaking, the action of a subject. Whether the philosophy is that of the structural unconscious or of the mind as a cognitive machine, the result is the same. The paradigmatic example of this in the French context has always been the production of a literary work: the book is often held to be written in virtue of mechanisms at work either above or below the level where people usually claim to locate their activity when they set themselves to writing.

The new philosophy of mind maintains that the subject of thinking is not the book, which is an external object containing nothing but printed signs, entities whose meaning and cognitive power are derived and secondary. The book by itself says nothing, thinks nothing, means nothing. There are no intentional phenomena whose substratum or "subject of attribution" can be located in the book itself.⁵ The subject of attribution is the mind and therefore, from the naturalistic point of view, the brain. This philosophy therefore seeks to show how such a subject's inner life can account for the external phenomena of mind.

I have just alluded to the two principal debates in the philosophy of mind in the twentieth century: the psychology of autonomous mental life versus the psychology of external behavior; the philosophy of the subject versus the philosophy of anonymous process. The first dispute took place primarily among American and British philosophers, which is why there is no word in French for "behaviorism." The second debate played a major role in the intellectual life of countries like Austria and France. It is not surprising that the two doctrinal oppositions in question do not overlap. Yet these two disputes have something in common: both are expressions of the same sense that modern philosophers confront a difficulty in defining the place of mind in the world. A modern philosopher is one who has decided to understand the world in the light of modern science, or rather, in the light of the natural philosophy that he believes must necessarily

accompany our natural science. It is only once this natural philosophy has been formulated that he begins to wonder how to complete it with a philosophy of mind.

In order to understand the initial question of every philosophy of mind—Where are the phenomena of mind located?—we will need to get a better sense of the oppositions I have just mentioned between the various possible positions. More to the point, it will be useful to be able to point out the lines of derivation and affinities among these points of view. For example, it would be helpful to know in what way cognitivism is not so very far from the classical philosophy of the subject and in what way it is also close to behaviorism. The sort of synoptic overview that we need, however, cannot be the direct result of a historical inquiry but will instead have to serve as a guide for just that sort of historical research into the evolution of ideas in this domain. It follows that we should now equip ourselves with a conceptual classification of the possible positions for a philosophy of mind (see below, § 1.3). In order to come to an understanding of the principle of this classification, we will begin with the following question: What distinguishes the position of the question of mind in a modern philosophy?

1.2. Mental Philosophy

“Much of cognitive science,” writes Jerry Fodor, “is philosophy rediscovered—and, I think, rehabilitated.”⁶ Fodor shows that this philosophy, which has regained a measure of currency thanks to the cognitivist program, is a version of what, in the nineteenth century, was called “representationism.”⁷ Cognitive psychology has rediscovered what Fodor calls a “Good Old Theory” according to which, as in the classic works of associationism, the mind is seen as a reader or operator of representations.

The traditional vocabulary of British philosophers also has a name for the type of philosophy whose rehabilitation (through the somewhat surprising metaphor of the computer) Fodor welcomes: they called it “mental philosophy.” John Stuart Mill, for example, wrote that Auguste Comte had rejected “Mental Philosophy.”⁸

I am similarly going to use this expression to designate a current in the philosophy of mind that comes out of Locke. This philosophy seeks to discover the laws governing human understanding, and even human nature. In doing so, it oscillates between two positions: a Cartesian one by which it reflects on what it is that is “present to mind,” namely “representative ideas,” and a naturalistic one the ambition of which is to formulate the laws governing the passage from one idea to another and, more generally, from one mental state to another. This philosophy of mind seeks vali-

dation through introspective reflection, yet conceives of itself as a mechanics of the mind. I believe that one finds a similar sort of vacillation today.

Why is mental philosophy a post-Cartesian project rather than a discipline that would have to be included in any philosophy with the ambition to be comprehensive? Why is there, strictly speaking, no Aristotelian mental philosophy? The reason is that mental philosophy can conceive of no other way to insure the autonomy of psychology than for it to take as its object a mind utterly separate from the world. For a mental philosopher, psychology has a justification precisely in the fact that the psychological subject does not have a direct relation to things but only to its *representations* of things. In order to study someone's mind—to understand, say, his behavior—the essential thing is not to know who he is, where he lives, and who his teachers were. The key is rather to know who he *thinks* he is, where he *thinks* he lives, and so on. That is mental philosophy's basic doctrine: the separation between the mental sphere and the world.

Mental philosophy is, in a sense, a psychology, but a psychology of beings who never display anything even resembling *psychic life*. Animation—the specific behavior of an animal system in its environment—is not its concern. It is instead concerned with representation, a phenomenon of presence to mind.⁹

What distinguishes a theory as mentalist is not, of course, the fact that it is put forward in language that includes the word "representation." In itself, this word is innocuous. It is likely that *any* philosophy of mind will have to refer to representations, whether it uses the word itself or an equivalent. I do not count myself among those critics who seem to think that this word has some strange magnetic power that explains the entire orientation of modern thought, as if one could explain many aspects not only of modern thought but of our history itself by the fact that representations are, etymologically speaking, *re-presentations*. The difference between mental philosophy and other sorts of philosophy has nothing to do with whether or not they use the word "representation." Instead, the difference lies in what they mean by this word and in the conceptual systems that undergird its use. Among mental philosophers, representation is not a vital activity and in this regard differs from other activities like extracting information from the flux and variation of one's environment or drawing up a plan of action so as to be ready to move within a milieu whose complete contours can only be guessed at based on the partial information at hand. Representation, for a subject or "intelligent system," involves entering into a certain relationship with a cognitive entity: for the mentalists of the past, a representational idea; for those of the present, a real and physical symbol located within the organism.

There is, however, one aspect of mental philosophy that makes it firmly post-Cartesian rather than Cartesian. As Bréhier emphasizes, the philoso-

phy of mind of the post-Newtonian classical thinkers is fundamentally unstable.¹⁰ Like Descartes's philosophy, it is opposed to natural philosophy. However, unlike Descartes's philosophy, it does not subsume the opposition between natural philosophy and mental philosophy within a rational system. Mental philosophy continually oscillates between proclamations of the autonomy of the science of the mental, on the one hand, and awkward imitation of the scientific paradigms of the day, on the other. Neither of these solutions is satisfactory. The autonomy of the mental is perhaps comforting for mental philosophers in that it gives them their own field of research, but it does so by excluding them from natural philosophy, thereby rendering their entire enterprise suspect. The condition for the existence of this philosophy would seem to have been the delimitation of a mental sphere impervious to the incursions of the elements and forces of the "external world." The external world, as this philosophy conceives its relation to mental activity, exists only in the form of representations. The autonomy of psychology thus devolves into a glorious isolation. Yet, this situation could not continue, for the secession of mental philosophy would also seem to threaten the division on which the autonomy of the physical is founded: the initial division between natural philosophy and philosophy of mind. The world external to the mind is a world that is *represented* as being external. Mental philosophy might therefore be suspected of preparing the way for an idealistic physics, a physics in which it would be known in advance that the physicist's conclusions will conform to certain *a priori* truths and that these truths will be those that the philosophy of mind discovers through its reflection on the conditions governing the representation of an external world by a representing subject. If philosophy proves unable to "naturalize" psychology, then natural science risks finding itself once again subordinate to the demands of a mind that prescribes laws, if not to the real external world, at least to the world represented as being external. This debate between those philosophers who want to naturalize psychology and those who want to make it into a (transcendental) first philosophy is at the heart of modern philosophy. And it is a debate internal to the tradition of mental philosophy.

1.3. *Taxonomy of the Philosophies of Mind*

It is today considered good form to declare that "Cartesian dualism" has finally been overcome. Yet experience shows that declarations of anti-Cartesian monism are not enough to establish a coherent unification of the two branches of philosophy: both the branch whose success has been universally admired, natural philosophy, and the branch that has not yet been so blessed, mental philosophy. Moreover, it is not unusual for one

and the same author both to declare himself a materialist and to advocate rehabilitating the representational psychology of Descartes's first heirs.

In order to get a clearer view of all this, it will be useful to ask what makes a philosophy of mind a mental philosophy. Not all philosophies of mind are mental philosophies in the way we are using this phrase here, namely: a mental philosophy is one that starts off by detaching the mental from the (material) external world, thereby ensuring the autonomy of the mental, one that only subsequently raises the inextricable problem of the *interaction* of the mental and the physical.

Using two criteria, I will construct a synoptic table that classifies philosophies of mind according to their phenomenologies. For two different questions must be asked: (1) *where* is the phenomenon under consideration, i.e., the mind, given?; (2) *how* does this phenomenon make its manifestations known? On the one hand, the phenomena of mind can be seen as phenomena that are either internal or external to the person: they are either given *inside* (in a mind that is detached from the world) or *outside* (in the world itself). On the other hand, the phenomena of mind can be held to be *direct* manifestations of mind or manifestations that are merely *indirect*. This latter distinction serves as a reminder that the notion of a "manifestation" can be taken in two distinct ways. It can be said that a thing manifests itself if it lets its presence be known even if it does not actually appear. In that case, it has manifested itself in something else or by means of something else, in the way that fire reveals its presence through the production of smoke. But one can also say that a thing manifests itself when it simply shows or reveals itself, in which case, the thing's manifestation is accomplished in its own activity and not merely in the *effects* of that activity. The difference can be made clearer by means of the distinction Wittgenstein draws between criteria and symptoms.¹¹ "How do you know what is the case in a given situation?" We answer this question by adducing phenomena. Our answer, however, will not have the same meaning when we take the phenomena we adduce to be *symptoms* of what is the case in the situation in question, that it will when we take them to be *criteria* for what is the case. For example: How do we know whether cats dream while they sleep? We will have to seek out *symptoms* that can provide our theory with a basis in induction. How do we know whether a student knows Latin? We ask him to translate a page of *De viris illustribus*. If he translates correctly, he knows Latin. There are two philosophies of this capability. For the mentalist, the external activity of translating is the symptom of the presence in the student of a mechanism or a cognitive state that explains his performance. Wittgenstein contested this conception. For him, the very notion of attributing a mental ability to someone—for example, the ability to understand Latin—is inseparable from the possibility of

giving one or more criteria for that ability: in our example, the manifestation of the ability in an act of translation. The relation between the imputed ability and its possible exercise is not one of cause to effect (or symptom) but an internal relation in which the application of one of these concepts logically requires the application of the other.¹² To translate necessarily shows, in the very act of doing it, that one *can* translate, and to be able to translate is precisely what we mean by knowing the language whose sentences one translates. The cognitive attribute thus does not apply to something in the mind of which we can only observe the external effects. It applies to something that manifests itself or is expressed directly in a public act.¹³

Applying these two dichotomies will allow us to contrast four different philosophies and to draw out the lines of opposition among them.

	<i>internal</i>	<i>external</i>
<i>direct</i>	Philosophy of consciousness	Philosophy of intention (Intentionalism)
<i>indirect</i>	Theory of the unconscious	Theory of mental causes (Mentalism)

We should first verify that these theoretical possibilities resemble doctrines that have actually been put forth. Among the four conceptions, two deserve to be elaborated. In our table, the philosophy of consciousness, like the others, is allotted only one square, a quarter of the space. Yet this is not commensurate with its importance in the history of ideas, where the philosophy of consciousness, far from being one among many varieties of mental philosophy, is the principal one. The theories of the unconscious and of mental causes can be seen as attempts to correct the philosophy of consciousness: first, by abandoning the idea that the phenomena in which mind is manifest are its direct expressions, then, by taking a further step and abandoning the so-called "first-person" perspective. These two conceptions may well call into question certain of the claims made by the reflexive philosophy of consciousness. They nevertheless should be included, like the philosophy of consciousness, within mental philosophy.

The same cannot be said for the fourth possibility on our table, which I've called "intentionalism." Intentionalism is the only possibility in the contemporary philosophy of mind about which it can be said that it avoids the paradoxes of (classical or recent) mental philosophy, for it is the only one that rejects the idea that the basis for the autonomous reality of the mind is its detachment from the world. This position is less familiar than the three others. Since it is the position that I intend to defend in what follows, it deserves a section of its own (see below, § 1.6).

1.4. *The Philosophy of Consciousness*

A philosophy of consciousness holds that the phenomena of mind manifest themselves directly: that the mind is given to itself in the self-presence called consciousness. These phenomena are, therefore, only given internally, i.e., in the interiority of a subject whose mental life may represent the external world but is otherwise unaffected by it.

It may seem normal or somewhat obvious to us that the principal characteristic of the mind (*mens*) is cogitation, i.e., the activity of directing its attention to various things. Yet, this idea was found to be surprising the first time it was put forth. Moreover, the first French translators of Descartes were reluctant to use the French word “*conscience*” [consciousness] to translate the Latin text where he claimed that “we are conscious.” It is as if they saw the eccentricity of this usage. For example, the definition of “thought” (*cogitatio*) proposed by Descartes was rendered by his French translators as follows¹⁴:

In the noun “thought,” I include everything that is inside us in such a way that we are immediately cognizant of it. Thus, all of the operations of the will, the understanding, the imagination, and the senses are thoughts. But I included the word “immediately” in order to exclude those things that follow from and depend on our thoughts: for example, voluntary movement has, in truth, its principle in the will, yet it is nevertheless not a thought.¹⁵

This definition of thought is as remarkable in what it excludes as in what it includes. It excludes action (voluntary movement) from thought. Yet it includes in thought both willing and sensation. Thereafter, to think that I am walking is mental, to want to walk is mental, but the action of walking with the aim of arriving where I’ve decided to go is only an effect of the mental. To walk is not “to think.” On the other hand, to will is an act of thinking. Even feeling—the experience of pain, for example—is an act of thinking.

The novelty and strangeness of the conditions that Descartes placed on consciousness become immediately obvious when one considers the misinterpretations to which they gave rise among his first readers. Gassendi, for example, in his objection to the second *Meditation*, asks why Descartes privileged an intellectual act. Why did Descartes feel the need to use “all this apparatus”¹⁶ in order to prove his existence? Without a doubt, if I think, I exist. But, according to Gassendi, *any* action could have provided the required premise: for example, if I am walking, I exist. Descartes protested that Gassendi had completely misunderstood his reasoning, going so far as to write:

I may not, for example, make the inference "I am walking, therefore I exist," except in so far as the awareness [*conscientia*] of walking is a thought. The inference is certain only if applied to this awareness, and not to the movement of the body which sometimes—in the case of dreams—is not occurring at all, despite the fact that I seem to myself to be walking. Hence from the fact that I think I am walking I can very well infer the existence of a mind which has this thought, but not the existence of a body that walks.¹⁷

But is it right to say that the conclusion of the inference "I am walking, therefore I exist" is not a good one? At first glance—and even after having thoroughly considered the question—Gassendi would seem to be right: the inference that moves from "I am walking" to "I exist" is an excellent one. Yet it ought to be clear that Descartes's response to his critic is not given from an exclusively logical point of view. Gassendi's error, in Descartes's view, is to have failed to take methodical doubt seriously (a mistake made by many of Descartes's readers, and not always the least attentive among them). Gassendi does not see that the meditative subject cannot use the premise "I am walking" precisely because he had rejected in advance any premise that could lead him into error. If, for Descartes, Gassendi's conclusion is incorrect, it is because the fact of walking does not have the kind of certainty required by the Method's extraordinary strictures.

Whatever an exegete might say to explain Descartes's response, it is nonetheless the case that Gassendi is right on the logical point. The inference "I am walking, therefore I exist" has the same logical force as does "I am thinking, therefore I exist." In both cases, there is an action that presupposes an agent. Yet the dispute between the two philosophers helps us better understand that only by becoming a mental phenomenon—a thought—can the act of walking enter into Cartesian reasoning. Not, of course, that taking a walk is somehow tantamount to thinking (or, more precisely, that walking is the embodiment of the thought of a possible walk) but in the sense that to be conscious of walking is to think that one is walking, regardless of what the fact of the matter is. This is the source of the troubling quality of a Cartesian consciousness for us. If I am consciously walking, and not sleepwalking, I am conscious of the fact that I am walking. No one will be surprised that the philosopher of consciousness expresses himself in this way. Indeed, he seems to derive his philosophy from simple common sense. But, when this same philosopher of consciousness goes on to claim that to *dream* that I am walking is also to be conscious that I am walking, he talks in a disconcerting way. Of what am I conscious if I can be conscious of taking a walk when I am not actually walking, i.e., when there is no walk of which I can be conscious? In order to serve as a premise in the argument of the *cogito*, it need only be consciousness or, as

the translator chose to put it, an internal “awareness.” Is taking a walk in thought or in a dream just a different way of walking? One may as well maintain that meals eaten in thought or solutions worked out in dreams are the equivalents—at least from the perspective of a thinking consciousness—of meals eaten at tables and solutions worked out in reality. How is one to distinguish between *consciousness* that one is walking and an *illusion* that one is walking? Descartes stresses the fact that his conception of the thinking consciousness was never meant to vouchsafe the fact of taking an actual walk (a physical event) but only of the presentation to the mind of something that is taken to be a walk (a mental event). Whether I am indeed walking or just deluded, a representation of myself in the act of walking will be given to me as my intentional object (*cogitatum*). And that is all that can be immediately present to the mind. It clearly follows that consciousness of walking is never consciousness that a walk is actually taking place, even in the case where my body is in fact taking a walk at the same time that I experience a representation of myself walking. Such is, in the end, the meaning of the separation between the internal world of the mind and the external world of bodies: the object of knowledge is not the walk I take but the mental phenomenon of consciousness of walking.

If cognitivism is, as Fodor suggests, the philosophical descendant of Descartes’s philosophy of representational consciousness, the consequences for it are immediately obvious: the psychology of a representing mind is a cognitive psychology but *without cognition proper*. What it calls “cognition” is not something that would be expressed by a sentence like: “I know what I am doing: I am walking.” Its conception of cognition is modeled on the Cartesian idea of consciousness as a pure “internal cognizance”: a system is the locus of a process of cognition because its structure allows it to be immediately aware of the presence within it of cognitive entities, i.e., internal representations. What makes these entities “cognitive” is not that they make known to the system that it is walking. For they do not do this. Rather, they are cognitive because they give the system the *representation* of what would be the case if it were walking. In order for it to be the case, the system would have to be associated with a body, and this body would have to be in the state indicated by the representation communicated to the mind. Is it? Whether it is or is not cannot be directly represented to it. The mind of an organism cannot ascertain whether the organism’s representation of walking is real or a dream, just as a computer cannot recognize whether the stroll, of which it is calculating a function, is real or a simulation.¹⁸

For all its flaws, the fact remains that the cognitivist philosophy of mind freed psychology of the first-person perspective. This was undeniably a step forward. Does this mean that the philosophy of consciousness has today disappeared? Hardly, for it is alive and well, sometimes in the systematic form of a philosophy of the subject, sometimes in the identification

that many researchers automatically make between the mental and the data of introspection. Jean-Pierre Changeux, for example, in a book that aims to acquaint the reader not only with the current state of scientific research into the nervous system but with his own theory of "epigenesis by selective stabilization of synapses," takes up just such a perspective in order to raise the question of the relationship between the "neural" and the "mental."¹⁹ This is the aim of Changeux's chapter 5, entitled "Mental Objects." It is interesting to note that this book, which is rightly celebrated for the great clarity of its presentation of difficult subjects, nevertheless contains one section whose obscurity frustrates even the most attentive reader: precisely the chapter where the author has moved from discussion of neurons and the organization of the brain to what he calls "mental objects," i.e., mental images and concepts. When Changeux talks of identifying "mental units" with "states of physical activity in neuronal assemblies,"²⁰ the reader has an understanding of the physical activities involved because the preceding chapters have explained them to him. But what are "mental units"? Where are we supposed to look for an understanding of this notion? Since when is a concept a mental entity with a corresponding neuronal configuration? The answer is apparently that the notion of a mental object is derived from the "introspective information." In short, the only philosophy of mind considered in this book is the old psychology of introspection, whose failings have often been noted.²¹

1.5. *The Reforms of Mental Philosophy*

Mental philosophy has not left in place its entire Cartesian inheritance. Among the elements that have been repudiated is the requirement that the mind's manifestations be given both directly and internally. Two reforms were needed, both of which are more correctly referred to as "theories." Because the mind is no longer given directly, it becomes what, in the philosophy of science, is called a "theoretical entity," i.e., an entity whose (hidden) presence and efficacy the theory invites us to postulate in order to account for observed phenomena. But the reader may find surprising the claim that there is a kinship between the theories of the unconscious or of the calculating mind, on the one hand, and the Cartesian legacy, on the other. This point merits a brief review here.

Are the *theories of the unconscious* critiques of consciousness? Do they call mental philosophy into question? On the contrary, it would appear that they are one of the most dynamic areas of mental philosophy. Thanks to certain spectacular controversies, we have grown accustomed to setting in opposition the philosophy of consciousness—the philosophy of the *co-*

gito—and the theories of the unconscious. These theories expressly present themselves as fostering ideas that subvert one of the founding orthodoxies of the established order. Yet the opposition between the philosophers of the *cogito* and the critics of consciousness is an optical illusion. The “critics of consciousness” are more like moralists or “psychological” writers (in the sense in which Nietzsche uses this term, i.e., in the same way that, in French, one refers to “moralists,” who are observers of character and passions). What their critique calls into question is not the metaphysician’s *cogito* but the good conscience of the acting individual who believes himself able, through sincere self-examination, to provide an accurate account of the real motivations of his conduct.

Theories of the unconscious call into question the discernment of the mental insight attributed by the philosophy of consciousness to all creatures endowed with apperception. But to challenge the idea that everything mental is conscious is to do nothing more than put forward the hypothesis that there are, beyond the field of consciousness, other mental events and operations about which the conscious subject knows nothing directly. This hypothesis does not exclude the possibility that a psychologist might indirectly learn something about those events and operations. Those unobserved operations and unconscious representations need do no more than make their effects evident within conscious life itself, manifesting themselves in the form of perturbations (for example, either the sudden emergence of incongruous elements or the unexpected absence of elements of which traces remain). Such perturbations allowed the theory to reconstitute, by means of its explicative models, what goes on in the furthest reaches of the subject’s mental life. For this theory, then, the phenomena of mind are internal but divided into two categories: the “superficial” phenomena that are immediately known to the subject, and the “deep” phenomena, which must be inductively inferred if one is truly to account for what is happening on the surface.

For the new *mentalist* philosophers, the phenomena of mind are also indirect: we observe behavioral phenomena and seek their satisfactory explanation. The behaviorist answer would be the right one if it were able to provide explanations without making hypotheses about the events taking place within the “black box” of the system whose behavior is being studied, between the external stimulation and the visible reaction. But the complexity of the behavior generated by the “black box” goes beyond anything that can be explained by the control exerted on the organism by the external environment. So hypotheses about the internal events of the system are required, and the new mentalist philosophy aims to provide them. For it, mental activity has nothing to do with a flux of consciousness experienced by a subject. Mental activity is the object of a theoretical hypothesis

regarding the mental causes of the behavior of a physical system. It is as if this philosophy had inverted Descartes's perspective: I see a body that is walking and, as I am unable to explain its movements using theories applicable to billiard balls, I postulate that there is within this body a complex system which controls its observable movement. This system is called "mind." The problem for the theorist is then to find a satisfactory model for the mental, i.e., one that would allow him to conceive of an interaction between the physical and the mental.

It turns out that today's mentalist philosophy relies on the same conception of observable conduct as does the behaviorism it is at such pains to denounce: that behavior is a physical phenomenon whose cause must be sought. But it has the same conception of this cause as did yesterday's mentalist philosophy: that this cause is a mental process. Above all, this philosophy rehabilitates the theory of representative ideas, all the while insisting that these ideas are not ideal constructs but real cerebral entities.

1.6. The Philosophy of Intention

In our table of philosophies of mind, what I called "intentionalism" is the conception of mind characterized by the following phenomenology: the origins of the phenomena of mind are not internal, and the phenomena of mind are given directly (i.e., they are expressions, and not effects, of what they make manifest). The convergence of these two traits leads to the conclusion that a book, for example, is literally a mental commodity—and not in any derived sense. This obviously does not mean that a book thinks, reflects, draws conclusions, or in any way behaves like a thinking subject. Books are mental commodities because they express thoughts. In general terms, the relation between thought and language is not one of efficient causality. When we read a book, we do not proceed from the printed signs to the author's thought as we would from an effect to its cause. Whatever causality is at work is *formal* causality. The expression of thought in language and in action is not a mere index of mental life or the starting point of a deduction. It is, rather, the paradigmatic example of mental life.

That the phenomena of mind are not internal in origin does not exclude the possibility of their being internalized. Mental life can become an internal life. But that requires discipline. One can keep one's thoughts to oneself, read silently, or avoid expressing one's opinions. It is not clear, however, that these possibilities are open to every intelligent being. The experience of playing poker would suggest that this power is acquired through practice and maturity. Whatever the case, the fact that one can keep one's opinion secret or calculate in one's head offers no support to

the doctrine of the interiority of mind, because such exploits are more complex than the corresponding ones of simply forming an opinion or carrying out a calculation.

Yet it may have been misleading to give the name "intentionalism" to the fourth possibility in my table of phenomenologies of mind. The fact that this possibility is called "the philosophy of intention" could be taken to suggest that other schools do not appeal to the concept of intention in their definition of the mental. Such a conclusion is obviously false. The phenomenological doctrine of the Husserlian school, for example, can legitimately claim to be a "philosophy of intention." Its partisans might rightly extol the crucial role that this philosophy has played in the revival of the philosophical theme of intention within contemporary thought. The phenomenological doctrine, as presented by Husserl in the *Cartesian Meditations*, is and seeks to be a philosophy of consciousness. For Husserlian phenomenologists, mental phenomena are the "lived experiences of consciousness" and have the structure of Cartesian consciousness described by the schema *ego-cogito-cogitatum*.²² This school practices what it calls "phenomenological reduction": the separation of the mind (one might even say its "absolutization") in relation to the given. In much the same way, John Searle is today working out an analysis of the intentionality of the mental explicitly within the context of a definition of mind as consciousness.²³

I will have to clarify the way in which the term "intentionalism" is here understood in order to account for the varied philosophies of intentionality. I borrow the term "intentionalism" from the contemporary philosophy of action.²⁴ Georg von Wright has distinguished two conceptions of practical intention, i.e., of the sort of intention by which one carries out an action. For the causalist, the concept of intention is that of a mental cause of the actor's behavior: to know the actor's intentions is to know the internal causes of his action. For the intentionalist, an intention cannot be understood as the cause of an action or a mental event distinct from the movements and gestures of the actor and which would then be their necessary and sufficient antecedent. Instead, for the intentionalist, a practical intention is *nothing other* than the action itself described in its mental aspect, i.e., in its distinctive teleology. As von Wright explains, the intentionalist sees an internal—conceptual or logical—relationship between the subject's intention and his action. But to speak of an internal or conceptual relationship between the two is another way of agreeing with Wittgenstein: an intentional action is not an *effect* of the actor's thought, it is an *expression* of it.

I will therefore reformulate my thesis as follows. My thesis is not that any philosophy for which the mental is defined by intention will in virtue of this fact occupy a distinct position in the table of phenomenologies of

mind. Most contemporary philosophers, at least the analytic ones, have accepted what is called "Brentano's Thesis": that the mental is characterized by intentionality. My thesis is rather that a philosophy of intention is only complete if it can account for the relation between the logical and practical uses of the term "intention." The logical use originates in the technical vocabulary of scholastic logic.²⁵ This is the definition that Brentano took up and that was passed on to the Husserlian phenomenologists. The practical use is that elaborated by jurists and moralists in their analyses of the *actus humanus*. In both cases, the logical and the practical, the word "intention" is used in a technical sense, even where the practical usage also shows up in ordinary language. So my thesis ends up being the following: intentionalism, as the analysis of the different forms of intentionality, must take the practical usage of the word "intention" as its point of departure. This is why it must call into question the way that mental philosophy secures the reality of the mind, namely through the disassociation between things and their representations in a person's head.

The notion of *intentionality* was first used by the scholastics and then regained favor in the work of Brentano and his successors, notably the Husserlian phenomenologists. Only later was it adopted by philosophers in the analytic style, and then more in reference to Brentano than to Husserl. In contemporary writings, what is known as Brentano's Thesis is the following proposition, that can indeed be gleaned from his work on psychology: *Everything mental is intentional and everything intentional is mental.*²⁶

The short passage from which Brentano's famous Thesis has been extracted is generally acknowledged to be exceedingly obscure.²⁷ All that can be derived from it are images that are themselves in need of interpretation. Mental phenomena are held to have as their distinctive trait the fact of being "oriented" toward something other than themselves, of having a "direction" or of possessing a kind of significance or capacity to refer to something else. The distinction drawn is apparently between physical phenomena, which are what they are and do not refer to anything, and psychical phenomena, which are what they are by being about something else.

Unfortunately, when we ask Brentanians or Husserlians what concept of intentionality we are supposed to derive from this passage, the answer is invariably couched either in misleading explanations or in images that are too vague to be of much help. Their analyses of mental intentionality are constructed along the lines of the famous saying according to which "all consciousness is consciousness of something." Thus, the intentionality of perception would correspond to the following: to perceive is always to perceive something. Similarly, the intentionality of love could be expressed thus: all love consists in loving something. Such formulas are in fact am-

biguous. If we apply them not to mental acts or states of mind but to the *descriptions* of those acts and states, the formulas are irreproachable and provide the starting point for any analysis of intentionality. They highlight a fact about the language in which we ascribe mental action to someone: this language cannot contain just a verb, but must also have a direct or indirect object specifying the content of the verb. To say that “someone is imagining” is elliptical until one has specified *what* is being imagined, the object of the person’s imagination. What conclusion can we draw from this analysis of the language of the mental regarding the analysis of the mental itself? It is in making this step that formulas like “Every *cogitatio* is a *cogitatio* of a *cogitatum*” become misleading. They have the flaw of covering up the decisive issue by conflating the intentionality of acts or mental states with a certain grammatical *transitivity* or property by which certain verbs require a direct object. Yet the notion of intentionality is useful precisely to the extent that it allows us to avoid conflating the grammar of psychological verbs (like “to perceive” or “to love”) with those of ordinary transitive verbs. From a purely linguistic point of view, the grammar of the verb “to seek” cannot be distinguished from that of the verb “to find.” Both require an object. But, from a logical perspective, the philosopher cannot help but notice the following difference: it cannot be true that someone has found something unless there is a something that he has found; but it can be true that someone is seeking something without there being any real entity that is what he seeks. For example, someone can seek the solution to a problem that is in fact insoluble. Or he can seek a dog’s owner when the dog is in fact a stray. As a result, in our example, the formula for intentionality would have to be the following: Every finding is surely the finding of something, and that is why the verb “to find” *is not* (or not entirely) intentional. For one cannot find unless there is something that is the object that one finds. By contrast, one can easily seek without there being anything at all that is the object of one’s seeking. Thus every case of seeking *is not* about something else, and this is what makes the verb “to seek” fully intentional.

The classic formulas for intentionality construe it as a complication of the relationship between subject and object. They thereby mask or attenuate what should really be emphasized: that intentionality is in no way a kind of transitivity.²⁸ But if we reject the misleading formulas that present intentionality as a transitive quality of mental acts, we are left with little more than the images that accompanied that definition. These images, though often brilliant, give us no purchase on the analysis of intentions. They have nothing but a polemical force: they set in opposition, for example, the “openness” of a mind characterized by intentionality and the “closed” quality of the classic representational subject’s mental world, with the latter being incapable of moving beyond the compass of its mental

images or ideas. Or they draw a contrast between the disquiet and enthusiasm that are constitutive of the subject of intentions, on the one hand, and a kind of torpor or dazed satisfaction with things, one that can never be drawn "outside of itself" (or "torn," as is also said, out of its "immanence"), on the other. Such images should not be taken to be analyses, though it must be acknowledged that they provide a forceful expression of the expectations of those they inspire. The explanation for the enthusiasm demonstrated by several generations of French philosophers for the ideas of Husserl and Heidegger seems to me not to lie in any profound assimilation of the technical and conceptual aspects of the difficult doctrines propounded by the masters. Rather, this enthusiasm can be better explained by their prior adherence, based on such suggestive stylistic figures, to a philosophy whose rationale was far from being grasped but about which it was understood that it promised to overcome the psychologism and representationism inherited from classical philosophy. So it was that Jean-Paul Sartre, in his famous article on intentionality in Husserl, won an entire generation of young philosophers over to the cause of phenomenology by presenting Husserl's thought as a doctrine of life in the wide open spaces, which he skillfully contrasted with the reclusive existence that academic idealism would force us to adopt.²⁹

If we are going to take an image as our point of departure, we might as well return to the one that lies at the origin of the philosophical acceptance of the term "intention." The image is that of the archer who aims his arrow at a target, a deer, say. This is still only an image, but one that at least allows us to sketch out a preliminary analysis to illustrate the main conceptual oppositions. The situation of the archer aiming at a deer is characterized by the *distance* that separates him from the animal. This distance has not yet been traversed, and there has not yet been contact between the two in the way that there will be if the arrow is released and hits its mark. It is not even certain that the distance will ever be traversed, given that the archer may well miss his mark. Are we ready to say that the distance is traversed in the mind, or in the archer's intention? To do so would be to hastily assimilate the archer's thought to a kind of mental arrow that has in some way already hit its mark and that is immediately in contact with the target, while the physical arrow still has some work to do in order to reach its destination. Moreover, it may well be that the archer has not properly aimed his weapon or that he has not gotten a clear view of what he is aiming at.

In a word, the language of intention ushers in the distinction between failure and success, between correct and flawed orientation. The question of whether the archer has properly aimed his arrow is answered when the arrow hits something. Has the archer hit what he was aiming at? If we

consider the question from outside, without taking his intentions into account, we will have to answer that, by definition, he has hit what he aimed his arrow at: what he was aiming at is the first object we find that intersects the line describing the direction of the arrow. Such description could be called "external" or "material." It leaves aside the intentionality of the archer's behavior because it sees things from what, in logic, is called an "extensional" point of view. In other words, this description is an answer to the question, what is in relation with what in this case?

If we assess the situation from the point of view of the intentions or meanings at work, we will make a distinction between successes and failures: is the thing that the archer in fact hit what he intended to hit when he drew his bow as he did? Or did he make a mistake? It should be noted that there are several ways of making a mistake, for example by shooting the arrow someplace other than where the deer is located or by hitting, say, a dog when he thought he was shooting at a deer.

The same could be said of linguistic activities. Someone can write a letter addressed to the Director of the Opera and in so doing believe that he is writing to X when his letter will in fact be received by Y who, unbeknownst to the letter writer, has replaced X as Director of the Opera. The letter is here like an epistolary arrow. Someone can also speak of the Director of the Opera and believe he is speaking about X when he is in fact speaking of Y. Finally, someone can think (either out loud or to himself) about the Director of the Opera. The problem of intentionality is then one of knowing whether he is thinking about X, about Y, or about neither of them in particular. The solution is that thought is not a mental arrow. Therefore, a thought about the Director of the Opera is about nobody in particular and, in this sense, *has no object*, since it bears on whichever person happens to occupy the position at the moment in question. When somebody thinks about the present Director of the Opera, there is no relationship between a subject and an object but simply the determination of the act of thought by an intellectual content.³⁰

The main lesson to be drawn from these observations is that the problems raised by the intentionality of action are not essentially distinguishable from problems raised by the intentionality of language or the intentionality of mental acts.³¹ Solving analogous difficulties will thus require similar analyses.

The consequence of this is that a philosophy of mind that defines the mental by intentionality will have to be a philosophy of action as much as a philosophy of purely intellectual operations. Many philosophers have, as it happens, come to this conclusion. In *Content and Consciousness*, for example, Daniel Dennett is reluctant to treat the verbs "hunt" and "search" as what he calls "mental terms."³² He prefers to call them "psychological terms," with the result that Brentano's Thesis applies to both

the mental and the psychological. Donald Davidson, by contrast, is not troubled by such considerations. Intentional action is part of the mental because it successfully passes the "test of the mental" proposed by Brentano's Thesis.³³ Lion hunting is mental just as is representational painting, not because it takes place entirely in one's head or because painting is not done on a canvas but because both require sustained attention, calculation, and an order of operations that allows one to make adjustments, corrections, and coordinations that render the result the work of an agent.

These remarks on intentionality would obviously be inadequate if our aim here were to articulate the logic of intentional grammatical constructions. They nonetheless provide us with a first sketch of intentionalism, a doctrine that not only defines the mental by intentionality but includes action itself within the mental, rather than construing it, in the Cartesian way, as a consequence or effect of mental processes. Descartes's philosophy of mind presupposes a definition of thought (*cogitatio*) that excludes action itself from the mental, in order to retain only the will. Intentionalist philosophy, by contrast, escapes from the gravitational field of mental philosophy precisely by conceiving the philosophy of mind as a philosophy of action.

The principal trait seems to me to be this: if both gestures and mental acts are intentional in an analogous way—in that both "aim at" something—then one cannot continue to conceive of intentionality as a relation between subject and object. Indeed, the word "object" is ambiguous if we are supposed to believe that thinking of Pierre is a relation between a subject and an object (Pierre) and that planning a trip to Italy is also a relation between a subject and an object (a trip to Italy). If we say that these are different types of objects within a more general category of objects in general, we would be doing nothing more than insisting that the conceptual scheme based on transitivity be applied in all cases: not only in cases of ordinary transitivity, but also in cases of intransitivity, which will have to be held to be cases of extraordinary transitivity. In fact, if we were to take at face value the apparent transitivity of intentional verbs, we would have to say that the act signified by such verbs *always has an object even when it doesn't*. When I plan to take a trip to Italy, my planning has an object even if, in the end, I abandon my plans and even if, as a result, there is no trip to Italy that I planned to take.³⁴

In order to understand intentionality, it is more worthwhile to follow the lines of analysis suggested by the metaphor of the archer. If the arrow has a direction, and if the bow is drawn in a position so that the weapon is pointed at something, it is because the archer has given his bow this direction for a reason. Drawing his bow is indeed a transitive action, but the object to which this act transitively applies is the bow, not the deer. On the

other hand, the way that the bow is drawn is dictated by the goal, which is to hit the deer by releasing the arrow.

More generally, intentionality is the mark of the mental because it is a *phenomenon of order*. The archer carries out his movements in a certain order, whether viewed from a synchronic or diachronic point of view. The coordination of these movements is intelligible and can be explained by a rational principle: his movements are carried out one after another (or simultaneously) so that the arrow will go toward the target.

Now imagine that you return home and find a strange object in front of your door, a package, say. If it is there by chance or has simply been forgotten by someone, then its presence at your door has no particular significance: it is a brute fact of physical presence. If, however, you understand that the package has been left there so that you will notice it on your return home, or if you understand that it is there so that the plastic explosives it contains will destroy your apartment, you will conclude that the package is in its proper place where it is. It is in its proper place for whoever left it there for you, even if it is not in the place where you would prefer that it be (in which case, you will probably try to move it). An intentional phenomenon is at work whenever a disposition of things can be seen not as the result of the history of each of these things taken separately, but as the result of a thought that embraces an entire set of facts.

Understood in this way, “mind” is not primarily defined by consciousness or representation but by order and finality. *Mentality*—what makes it the case that something or someone has a mind—is then conceived as the power of producing an *order of meaning* somewhere. The important thing is not the place where this order is realized: it may be within, in the interiority of immanent activity; or it may be without, on paper, for example. The multiplicity that is to be ordered may be a flux of mental images or perhaps a set of memorized data (as in the activity of reflection). The multiplicity can be a set of gestures and operations to be carried out with the arms, legs, and torso (as when one serves the ball in tennis). In any case, the notion of intentionality refers to a power of mind. We might follow Leibniz here in calling this power an “architectonic” capacity. Many philosophers of mind think of the mind in Hobbesian terms according to which to think is to calculate.³⁵ Leibniz proposes an alternative image of the mind as a constructor rather than a calculator. To think may well be to manipulate symbols, but it is above all to invent an order in which they take on a meaning or to find an arrangement in which they offer a solution to a problem we have put to ourselves.

For, not to mention the wonders of dreams, in which we invent without effort (but also without will) things we could only discover after much thinking when awake, our soul is architectonic in its voluntary activities also, and,

discovering the sciences in accordance with which God had regulated things (*pondere, mensura, numero, etc.*), it imitates in its own sphere, and in the little world in which it is allowed to act, what God performs in the great world.³⁶

This text calls for two clarifications, however. First, it would have been better to say that a *man* can organize his conduct relative to a goal, in order to avoid suggesting that the architect of the actions a person accomplishes is not the person himself but a separate subject (the soul). Second, Leibniz's theological analogy seems to reverse the order of things, for the idea of an order imposed on things is entirely anthropomorphic. Man is not thought of in theological terms by being endowed with an architectonic power. Rather, divine power is conceived in human terms when it is compared to that of an architect.³⁷ Yet Leibniz nevertheless splendidly highlights the fact that the problem of the mind is a problem of architecture.

In this chapter, I have maintained that a philosophy of mind must begin with a phenomenology of mind in the modest sense, i.e., with a response to this preliminary question: Where are mental phenomena given, and how do they manifest what they manifest? The conflicts among the various philosophies of mind are primarily about what is appropriately called a "mental phenomenon."

Accepting the classification of the conceptions of mind that I proposed earlier allows us to restate the entire philosophical problem of mind as a question regarding the relationship between the mental and the practical. In what way can a walk be characterized as mental? Is a mental stroll one that is carried out only "in thought" in the same way that a mental calculation is done in one's head rather than on paper? To calculate mentally counts as calculating just as surely as does calculating with a pencil on paper, yet a walk taken only "in thought" is no walk at all. Reflections of this kind may lead us to call into question the Cartesian division between thought (consciousness) and action (movement). A walk is a mental phenomenon if it is carried out with an objective and a goal. The movements of a walker are mental, not in the Cartesian sense in which these movements are what the walker is conscious of doing (whether rightly or wrongly), but in the intentionalist sense that they are what the walker thinks he must do in order to carry out his intention to walk. In this light, a walk is a mental act because the fact of walking is intentional. Yet the intentionality of walking is not to be found in a relationship between the walker and an intentional object: in, say, a purported relation of belief with the proposition "I am walking." Such a claim takes us back to the representationism we have already rejected. The intentionality of a walk must be sought in the intelligible order given to all of the gestures and

undertakings that make up the walker's tack. These movements are governed by the thought of the walk to be taken and not, for example, by the thought of having to get to one's place of business.

There is, of course, a dissident strain of phenomenology which has sought to work out a philosophy of intention outside of the framework put in place by the philosophies of representational consciousness.³⁸ One cannot but applaud the motivations behind this dissidence: the notion of intentionality cannot be of a *relation* between a subject and an object. But this brand of phenomenology, which at one point was called "the phenomenology of existence," has, in my view, failed to live up to its promise precisely because it reinstated in an enhanced form the very subject/object schema that it was at such pains to reject. It has continued to assume that intentional verbs are *transitive* verbs.³⁹ In so doing, the phenomenology of existence has only added to the considerable difficulties faced by a conception of intentionality that sees the mental act as one that transcends the sphere of the subject.⁴⁰ Those difficulties are compounded by a doctrine that sees intentional verbs as transitive ones yet whose direct object resembles nothing that can be designated *as* an object. That said, it is true that it is often difficult to determine who has and has not understood the theses of the "existential analytic." I make no claim to have grasped the intricacies of this doctrine, and would ask only to be enlightened by those who have been convinced by it, assuming they are willing to explain it.

We have seen how the determination of the phenomena of mind is a function of how one sees the relationship between someone's mental activity and his behavior. If action is exterior to the mental, the relation is that between apparent effect and latent cause: the corporeal movements of a subject are then symptoms of his mental life. If, however, action is included within the mental, the behavior is rather the *expression* of mental life. I have attempted to show that the discussions of this issue in contemporary philosophy of mind derive from a tradition of thought that goes back to the origins of modern philosophy. The novelty of today's terminology and arguments ought not disguise the enduring nature of the problem.

The subject of these discussions is essentially this: What do we expect from an explanation of someone's conduct in terms of his thoughts and intentions? In other words, what sort of explanation do we expect a science of mind to provide? Here again, the contrast is clear. It is as if mental philosophy feels itself duty bound to work towards the creation of a science of mind. If it ever establishes the principles of such a science, it will have accomplished for the mind what natural philosophy achieved long ago. Though the partisans of mental philosophy readily acknowledge that we do not yet have a science of mind that meets their expectations, they often seem to believe that its appearance is imminent. By contrast, intentionalist

philosophers believe that there is no need for speculation about what a science of mind will be or ought to be. Our concept of mind does not exist in a void: it is the general name of a vast network of concepts used by people to explain themselves and to talk to one another. Moreover, these concepts have already been subject to a certain systematization, particularly in the rhetorical arts as used by judges and lawyers, political orators, and historians. The application of these kinds of concepts to the material furnished by historical experience is the daily bread of the *moral sciences*, so called because they are the study of mores, the ways of doing and thinking of various people. For the intentionalist, the sciences of mind are to be found nowhere else.