PART III

Dual aspect theory

Introduction

Part I began with the question: Are there any *a priori* limits to what can be willed? Such a question springs naturally to mind as one starts to philosophise about the will. This is because the very first stages of a philosophical inquiry into the the will inevitably begin with the adoption of a radically interiorist volitionist and even quasi-magical theory of action. Then this somewhat dualistic doctrine in turn suggests that, rather as we might someday come to see the presently invisible and indeed in principle see almost anything, so the will might break free of its skin cage and in principle work its effects far and wide and without limit. Now this line of thought, while not of course committed to the philosophies of that era, has about it overtones of the early romantic movement – a time when the spirit was thought of as but loosely chained to its fleshly home – and quite easily keeps company with an idealist philosophy of Nature. And so one might suppose that all that prevents one's will from ranging without limit across nature at large is, first the ultimate contingencies of a metaphysics which simply and unaccountably affirms that *this* may be willed and *that* may not be willed; and second the sheer finitude of one's will's *power* – which one might nonetheless *strive* to make felt far and wide – in the manner of a spirit or even a Deity! As if the project of becoming God were merely impossible of fulfilment! This first and most extreme theory of the will conceives of it as a quasi-occult psychological force that suffers from no other constraints than the arbitrary decrees of metaphysical fate and its own apparent finitude.

Then the question that I posed concerning the possibility of *a priori*-given limits is anti-romantic and sceptical-realist in spirit. For it seeks to rein in the will's aspirations within the bounds of intelligibility. Not, I think, out of negativity of spirit, but in the interests of realism. Thus, it has no desire to clip its wings, yet seeks nonetheless to bring it down to the earth to which it belongs. Then to grasp that certain criteria must be satisfied if a phenomenon is to count as willed, and to see in addition that

these somewhat complex requirements are not what a quasi-magical volitionist theory would lead one to expect, and thereby come to understand that they might outlaw *a priori* the very possibility of willing certain phenomena, is to advance the philosophy of action from its first libertarian or untrammelled and interiorist stage to the next sceptical and as it were disconsolate moment. It was with this in mind that I advanced reasons for supposing that belief, and indeed action itself along with striving or trying, all of logical necessity lay beyond the scope of the will. Then if the 'paradise' of a potentially limitless power was hardly that of a fool, it must nonetheless have been entirely without substance. A disappointment, it may be, to some. But hardly a surprise. As every life viewed from the inside appears as a succession of defeats, at least if La Rochefoucauld is to be believed, so the movement of thought appears as a series of false terms of reference, if Philosophy is to be taken as any guide.

These constraints were all upon the efficacy of 'mental willings': that is, upon the attempt to will psychological phenomena (like belief and striving). But what of 'bodily willings'? May we likewise hope to discover limits of logical inflexibility to the range of efficacy of the bodily will? Here a second question comes to light along with the original question of *a priori*-given limits. Namely, that of the supposed *interiority* of this phenomenon: the alleged absolute ontological elevation or 'superiority' of the bodily will over the body and matter that it 'commands'. For the analytic determination of the limits of bodily willing reveals facts which strongly suggest that the body may leave its stamp overtly *within the very mind itself*! (In short, sceptical-realism, so to say, carries the war over into the enemy's camp.) In demonstrating the inherent absurdity of the limitless aspirations of the quasi-magical volitionist will, it advances considerations through which we may divine that, in bearing the unmistakable marks of its earthly connections, the bodily will cannot in any case be quite out of the ontological 'top drawer'. The conception of the will as a spiritual force which, from an incomparably higher plateau of being, exercises a potentially limitless sway over the domain of mere matter, proves to be doubly suspect.

The aim of the above sceptical-analytic stage of my inquiry was to provide *such* an analysis of the constituent elements of the phenomenon and concept of bodily action as would admit our assembling an example of willing in which the will manages to strike out beyond the body and into the environment at large – realistically: to accomplish this feat despite the existence of limiting factors. One important limiting factor that emerged was, that a regularly acting bodily mechanism has to be the avenue through

which the antecedents of physical action give rise to a willed event. This limits the domain of the willable enormously. But it is also of ontological import. For in tying the bodily will so tightly to the body, it provides reason for supposing that we are dealing with a more primitive psychological phenomenon than traditional radically interiorist volitionism has assumed: a phenomenon at the level of (say) sensations or hunger or thirst, all of which are in comparable manner closely dependent upon the body. Then this would be to reject traditional doctines of volitionism, which by and large model the volition upon the thought or the giving of internal commands. And it would be to tie the mind, absolutely overtly and from the inside, to the body and its matter. It would be to demonstrate a kind of 'iron in the soul'.

Such a view found corroboration in the conclusions of Part II. Thus, I attempted in Part II to explain the necessary presence of 'feel' in bodily action. It emerged that its role was entirely epistemological: that it was there to give to the will, in the peculiarly immediate manner that is needed for bodily action, both the bodily target-zone in which it is to strike and the goal-event willingly effected therein. Now such a givenness is without parallel. For it is at once intuitional *and* immediate *and* almost invariably attentively recessive *and* such that both the target-zone and goal-event are given without mediation by concepts. Whereas the thought gets its object through the aid of the concept, and visual perception gets its object intuitionally and through the imposition of concepts, through what does the stray impulse to tap a left foot find the left foot to set it tapping if and when the mind is deeply absorbed in other matters? It finds it without the mediation of concepts. There exists no 'feeling *as* . . .' analogue of the 'seeing as . . .' or 'hearing as . . .' of the other modes of perceptual awareness. The givenness of the limb is simply generated by the inhering of a set of 'feels' in a mind that is endowed with a determinate long-term image of body and hence of self *qua* material object. It happens without the assistance of more developed mental phenomena. Then this fact likewise suggests that bodily willing must be a much more primitive phenomenon than (say) thought or sight. That is, than volitionism in its customary form would suppose.

Part II continued the enterprise of providing a criterial analysis of bodily action. Thus, as a result of the explanation of the role of 'feel', the analysis proceeded to encompass the requirement that the very first target point of application of the bodily will should find veridical representation both in the short- and long-term body-image. Accordingly, a form of physical self-consciousness, the primitive and inarticulate seeming to oneself to be

physically finite and of determinate character, emerged as a necessary element of bodily action. (For all action is the production of change in oneself – as it were a mode of restlessness.) Then Part III continues this analysis. For I will shortly enrich it with an additional psychological element: more, with *the* psychological element, viz. bodily willing itself. Now this may come as a surprise; for the discussion in Parts I and II, in diverting us from traditional volitionism, might seem to have rendered any such psychological item otiose. After all, the inner life of bodily action might seem to be exhaustively catalogued once we duly note the special cognitive relations in which we stand to any intentionally willed bodily phenomenon ϕ, together with the 'immediate presence' of a target limb and of willed ϕ therein. Once the central role of the intention is recognised – and it is the intention origin that explains the special cognitive relations to intentionally willed ϕ, which was after all the feature Wittgenstein had in mind when he remarked in his usual cryptic and insightful (and, here, sceptical-negative) way that 'voluntary movement is marked by the absence of surprise'[1] – one might well suppose it bad metaphysics to postulate another psychological entity after the intention: an hypostatisation of the special properties of the intention.

Let me express this in different terms. In attempting to cut loose from the suffocatingly interiorist and obscurantist world of quasi-magical volitionism, one moves naturally towards a neo-behaviourist position on this matter. Not to the extent of denying interior phenomena as such, but in grudgingly tending to 'cut down on them', and in this particular case in a compensatory tendency to 'play up' the conditionals linking the antecedents of bodily action with bodily events (thereby as it seems to me short-circuiting the phenomenon of willing out of the picture). Thus, in assembling the criteria of and the constraints upon bodily willings, one notices first of all the aforementioned special cogitive relation to intentionally willed phenomena, and secondly an all-important physical factor, viz. the activation of a bodily mechanism. Now such mechanisms are physical states that are ultimately detected through our demonstrating that they make it true that a whole battery of conditionals has application to the agent of a bodily action: for example, decides-he-at-instant-t-to-at-that-instant-halt-bodily-movment-$\phi \supset$ halts ϕ (etc.). These conditionals relate present intention-onset events with events in certain select bodily extremities. In fact, they are the ultimate court of appeal in determining the will-status of putatively willed bodily events. For the inner life can offer no decisive guarantee

[1] *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953, §628.

concerning *any* bodily event that it has been willed: absolutely *no* interior event can accomplish this feat; so that one may well imagine that this is the last that one is going to hear about 'distinctive interior willing events'! The meaning-conferring item, the intention, together with the conditionals, incarnate so to say in the bodily mechanism, look to be all that one needs to ensure of an event that it has been willed – whereupon 'it is willed' would prove to have been a rather fanciful and myth-laden way of characterising the situation. And there is one other seemingly decisive reason why one might suppose so. Namely, if I know of some ϕ that it was generated by a decision's suitably activating a bodily act-mechanism for such an event, then it is *entailed* of ϕ that it was willed! But if the force of this inference is logical, how can we have need of a distinctive willing event? Indeed, what conceptual room is there for such an item? Is not this precisely the time to reach for Occam's Razor? Ought we not at this point ruthlessly to cut away the intellectual foliage?

But to dispense with such an item would be to do without the Prince Hamlet of the narrative! Those who endorse such a position are I believe those – and they may easily be physicalists – with a commitment to a too sharp dichotomising of mind and body. Being understandably dubious of an 'act of the will' that matches the traditional specifications laid down by volitionists, they proceed to throw the baby out with that particular bath water! Eschewing the volition of the 'volitionists', there is a tendency to transfer the role which it plays in act-situations onto that relatively sophisticated meaning-conferring internal entity, the intention – thinking thereby to do justice to the internal situation prevailing in physical action. And so the *sui generis* psychological event of willing tends to find itself banished from the scene. According to this line of thinking, the *only* internal event that is distinctive to action is, the intention state's mutating to the point of having an indexically given here-and-this-instant object. Nothing more.

To my mind, this is wildly improbable. Consonant with the ontology of events that we owe to the efforts of Donald Davidson and others, I opt for a categorical psychological event characterisation of bodily action: not in place of one cast in terms of conditionals, but together with and in advance of. And so I shall in Part III be concerned to argue for the existence of acts-of-the-will: to demonstrate their presence in voluntary actions of all kinds; and in general to establish the precise nature of their relation to bodily action. Later in Part III I shall advance considerations which consolidate earlier suggestions that bodily actions may be ontologically less elevated than traditional volitionism supposes. This leads me into an examination

of the ontological status of bodily action, which in turn necessitates my clarifying the ontological situation in the mind generally. In short, I hope by such means to salvage a drastically re-modelled volitionism, and at the same time to present a case against the traditional doctrine. Accordingly, I shall be arguing for the thesis that, vital as the intention is to bodily action, the volition is even more centre stage. And that act-desire is on a footing with the intention. Willing *and* act-desire *and* intention are each essential to the occurrence of a bodily action. Then this must be seen as a continuation of the process, begun in Part I, of assembling a detailed conceptual picture of bodily action. What is novel at this stage of the procedure is that we have inserted *acts of the will* into the picture. For what sort of a picture could it be if it omitted the most central element of all? – rather as if a portrait were to leave out the subject's face!

But before I consider this question in chapter 12, I shall first in chapter 9 examine the relation between physical action and perception. Here we encounter phenomena which strongly suggest a very general theory of the bodily will: what one might call a *dual aspect* theory. For we shall see that, from the point of view of observation, physical action is almost as near to us as our very thoughts, that it refuses to distance itself and appear on the horizon as a mere autonomous thing 'out there'. Such closeness to the mind suggests that the inner life of physical action should be treated with great seriousness, even to the point of admitting the act into the psychological realm, and although the act appears in Physical Nature! This 'transparence' to the observational standpoint, this 'systematic elusiveness' as of 'I' itself, has in my opinion a psychological source. It lies in the fact that the act relates immediately expressively to an internal item that is tightly integrated into the holistically bound contents of the mind, viz. the intention. This bond in turn integrates the act into that internally consistent network – even as the act manages ontologically to slip through the net. Herein lies the essentially ambiguous status of physical action that is the source of its especial interest and importance. For physical action is the exception that proves a certain rule. While it is paradoxically enough its close and indeed primitive kinship with perception, rather than the significant unlikenesses of these phenomena, that prevents it from appearing as just another object of observation to its agent, I do not believe the kinship to be such as or so total that we should ontologically construe the physical act as on a par with its immediate antecedents. And yet it is indicative of something. At the very least of causal proximity. But, I think, of more.

CHAPTER 9

Observation and the will

The problem I am concerned with in this chapter is that of the observation of one's own actions. Taking observation to be, not just perception, but perception that is a way of knowing, it seems clear that our fundamental relation to our own actions is non-observational. Then my primary concern here is to bring to light the full significance of this fact.

1. MY ACTIONS ARE SET IN MY WORLD

(a) Physical action is like one world intervening in another world

The astonishing thing about action is that it is possible at all. Thus, if a man is making a chair, you will find a physical causal explanation of the movement of each piece of wood from its initial to its final setting; everything that happens is in accordance with physical law; but you will look throughout this world for ever in vain for an analogous physical explanation of their coming together in the form that they did, a form that mirrors human need and the human body itself. (Try it.) There is no physicalistic connection between gloves and hands or between the waxen beings of Madame Tussaud and their human originals – unlike, say, the relation that holds between a man and his shadow. And yet the chair is a material object in physical space. So action seems like a leak from another realm or world into this world, a leak or intervention – an intervention such as God would effect were He able to effect change in the world without transgressing the Laws of Nature. It is true that this is not the unsual conception of a miracle. But suppose there existed an apparently endless arm roaming the universe, which we called God's Arm, the most distant reaches of which were situated near the farthest known galaxies; suppose all of its parts seemed to move in accordance with the laws of physics, but suppose nonetheless that any long-range prediction proved impossible – except occasionally through prophecy and doctrine. Were this example to make any sense, and

for physical reasons it may well not, some might wish to describe this as an example of one universe intruding into another. By action we irreducibly alter the state of the universe: a form or pattern appears that was not there before, the existence of which does not seem to follow in any way from the physical state of the universe beforehand. This is *creation*. We are ultimate sources of change in the environment in the way a river or hurricane is not. A chair or table is a kind of gift to the universe as a whole, as if from another God, certainly from another creator. In action we alter the *status quo*. If I am drawing a line, it is not in the final analysis the product of a physical force: it is originating from me: not from my body considered as physical object – for example, as emitter of sweat or light waves – but from my body as vehicle of another realm: that of (my) reason and purpose. We stand within and without physical nature.

(b) I cannot observe my own actions because they belong to my world

What do I mean by saying that my present actions are of *my world*? I mean that, along with thoughts and desires and intentions, these intelligibly linked items stand to me and to me alone in the bedrock relation of being known as such for what they are and of depending upon me for their very being: they depend somewhat in the way the elements of 'The World of Science' depend upon Science as groundwork. All items of my world present their face to me, and their face is their entire being[1] – in all cases but one. Physical action faces Janus-wise in two directions, and it is just this dual character that constitutes the lifeline for this world of mine, rescuing it from oblivion. So certainly I mean that I do not stand to my actions in the relation of observer, just as I do not adopt an observational standpoint to tell that I am amused, uncomfortable, anxious, and so forth. The greatest distance at which I can be placed from some of these phenomena is one merely of *distraction*: I cannot ever be in a condition of ignorance for want of observation. Equally, my own actions are, in some cases, capable of being placed at a distance of distraction, but this too is a distance of awareness and not of observation. Thus, when I notice a purposive act from which I have been momentarily distracted – say, car-driving as I am conversing – I do so non-observationally and immediately. I return to myself.

So, at the risk of uttering a tautology, I shall say that what at any moment I am doing is, from my point of view, not a part of *the world* (which we all inhabit) but of *my world* (wherein are set those linked items which unburden

[1] For what more is there to a mental-image than seeming as it seems?

their heart exclusively to me). If I am making something, then what I am producing is continuously 'shed' as what I *have done* and becomes simply a part of the world: the pyramids that took decades to construct are as much a part of the landscape as mountains. But what at any moment I am *doing* is for me at the juncture of my world and the world: at that point 'inner' meets 'outer', whereupon 'inner' becomes objectified and is 'shed' into the world as a thing.

Suppose you are engaged in an action like drawing a line or writing a letter, and suppose that you begin to wonder why it is that you cannot relate as observer to that action. (After all, it is visible to oneself and others, and you can relate observationally to the deeds of another!) Then it seems to me natural to offer the following reply. It is the essential function of observation to apprise us of the world that we all of us inhabit, whereas this that I am doing is still of my world. This is not yet a part of nature, of the *status quo*, of what is, but is on the brink – on the brink of becoming so.

I shall now attempt to typify or characterise the phenomena of action and of perception. We could say that, were observation to be withdrawn from the world and directed onto my actions, involuted away from the world onto my world, were I *per impossibile* to relate to my actions in the observational mode, then this would succeed in removing that relation between the world and my world upon which rests the identity of both my world and my actions. For it is essential to actions that they can refer beyond themselves, and to set them down as constituents of the world would be to erase that relation and rob them of their very *raison d'être*. My actions would lose their sense, and my world would lose its identity. So I would lose the world too.

I shall classify the actions of others as of the world. For there is no comparable difficulty posed by the idea of relating observationally to the deeds of another. Such observation merely requires that we perceive the active part of the agent, together with the field or object of action, and there is no question of removing through the act of observation a relation between the agent and environment which founds the identity of his actions.

2. THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF PHYSICAL ACTION AND PERCEPTION

I turn now to a discussion of certain primitive formative situations, in order to bring out the interdependence which is I believe essential to the very existence of physical action and perception. I stress that such a claim of