

## Dilemmas

**Dilemmas**  
The Tarner Lectures 1953



GILBERT RYLE



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I am very grateful to the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, for the honour they did me in electing me their twelfth Tarner Lecturer. This book is a slightly modified version of the Tarner Lectures which I delivered in Cambridge in the Lent Term of 1953.

G.R.

## Preface to this edition

BARRY STROUD



Philosophy changed its appearance around the middle of the twentieth century. It was still philosophy, but it looked, and felt, different from the lofty clashes among abstract doctrines and ‘isms’ it had often seemed to be in the past. It was becoming evident that the sources of philosophy could be found, and enquired into, right here on earth, in the apparently conflicting ways of thinking any reflective person can naturally fall into in trying to understand familiar features of the world around us. In Gilbert Ryle’s *Dilemmas* we are in the hands of a master of this newer conception of the relation between philosophy and everyday life. He realizes that the title of his book might suggest disputes between one philosophical school and another: ‘the feud, for example, between Idealists and Realists, or the vendetta between Empiricists and Rationalists’. But that is not Ryle’s terrain.

Ryle starts with ways of thinking we all engage in and with conflicts we can be brought to feel with other, apparently equally natural ways of thinking about more or less the same things. There is real charm in Ryle’s philosophical writing. His rich vocabulary of common expressions and the down-to-earth parallels by which he illustrates the structure of the apparently deeper quandaries bring the dilemmas vividly before the mind.

If I went to bed on Sunday night it must have been true on Saturday that I will go to bed on Sunday night, and so also true on the Saturday before that, and the Saturday before that, and so on. So whatever anyone does ‘has been definitely booked from any earlier date you like to choose. Whatever is, was to be.’ There is no place in a physical theory of the universe for the colours, tastes, and smells of the objects around us; it is enough to account for the physical effects those objects have on other objects, including the sensory systems of human beings and animals. But the scientific account cannot be denied, so this apparent rivalry between the world of science and the world of everyday life seems to banish the colours, tastes, and smells of things from the world altogether.

Ryle recognizes that such conflicts cannot be resolved by the simple diplomatic suggestion of different domains of interest for different people

for different purposes. We must come to understand how one side of the apparent dilemma, properly understood, does not actually deny what we know to be true on the other side. This is a high standard to meet. Whether Ryle overcomes the dilemmas he presents, and if so whether he does it in the same way each time, is a good question for the attentive reader.

In the 1950s it was widely proclaimed that philosophy is or involves ‘the analysis of concepts’. For Ryle, the concepts that give rise to philosophical puzzlement do not present themselves in isolation, but only within the dilemmas we seem inevitably led into in trying to understand from different directions what appear to be the same familiar facts.