



A Macat analysis of Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*

Michael O'Sullivan

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What we think of as the “mind” is little more than an illusion. That’s the provocative thesis of British philosopher Gilbert Ryle’s 1949 work *The Concept of Mind*.

Seventeenth-century French writer René Descartes, one of the fathers of philosophy, imagined the mind and body as two separate entities that combine to form a human being. This concept came to be called “mind-body dualism.” Ryle set about ridiculing Descartes’s idea of, as he put it, a “ghost in the machine” stating that it was “entirely false, and false not in detail but in principle ... not merely an assemblage of particular mistakes. It is one big mistake and a mistake of a special kind.”

Ryle argues that our distinction between concepts pertaining to the mind and others pertaining to matter arise from a problematic use of language (and particularly through what he calls “category mistakes”).

In *The Concept of Mind*, his best-known and most important book, Ryle establishes a new branch of philosophy, “the philosophy of mind.” The work remains an important statement in mid-twentieth-century philosophy.

You can find out more about how Ryle's ideas have been challenged and applied – and how his work has impacted on thinkers in other academic disciplines – by exploring further in the Macat Library.

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