A Connection of Mind and Body

In his essay "One's Knowledge of Other Minds", A. J. Ayer, by means of an argument from analogy, points out that although it is an empirical fact that I cannot be another person at the same time that I am myself, it is not inconceivable that I could, by means of my own experience, make an inductive inference as to what another person experiences.

The problem as Ayer views it is one of bridging the gap between minds. For though it is the case that two people can share the same experience, it is not the case that two people can have an identical knowledge that they do indeed have the experience in an identical fashion.

Ayer points out that there is the possibility of what he refers to as "telepathy". However, telepathy alone, though it does seem to connect two people by some means which is other than physical, does not secure the experience as one being identical in the minds of two people. Thus our knowledge (no matter how we define "knowledge") of other minds remains a question of empirical fact which can only be verified in an empirical connection.

What becomes obvious, as we seek empirical knowledge of other minds, is that we immediately fall into a gap which cannot be bridged. For the fact is, as we define knowledge, we can never have absolute knowledge of the mind of others. The question thus remains: how are we, if we are to remain separate from others, to justify any statement pertaining to the thoughts and feelings of others? For Ayer, what we are left with is "probable opinion" based on our experience. Furthermore it is only through the other's experience that he or she can give a "probable opinion" on our thoughts or feelings.

It is here that Ayer's claim to an argument by analogy takes on a meaning. For the only empirical evidence that one can obtain to argue for any probable opinion regarding one's knowledge of other minds is that one has empirical evidence of the thoughts and feelings that one experiences in one's own mind.

Ayer points out clearly that his analogy between two persons "can never be perfect". For him this is of no importance, for as one attributes knowledge of one's own experience to the minds of others, one necessarily attributes a chain of properties, all of which find connection in the experience itself and in the assumed description of the other. Ayer states that:

> "reasons will indeed be supplied to me by experiences of my own, just as the reasons which someone else may have for believing in the existence of my experiences must ultimately be supplied to him by experiences of his own. . . . Now when one ascribes some inner experience, some thought of feeling to another, the rational ground for this ascription consists in one's knowing him to possess some further properties. The assumption is that there is a uniform connection between the possession of these properties and the undergoing of an experience of the sort in question."

At the bottom of page four in *Pixie,* Pixie and Isabel are walking down the hall holding hands. Pixie states: "We didn't talk, because each of us was thinking." In terms of what Ayer is putting forth in "One's Knowledge Of Other Minds", this is a "probable opinion". In relating to herself, Pixie obtains the direct observation that she is thinking. This property, along with the properties of non-speech and properties of which she assumes to be a part of Isabel, allows her to surmise that Isabel is also thinking. Through a relationship of herself and the present conditions, Pixie thus makes an inductive inference.

Pixie, however, does not stop at making the statement that "each of us was thinking", she goes on to make a further guess that: "maybe she (Isabel) was thinking the same thing (as her)". Now, how are we to accept such a statement? In view of what Ayer is putting forth, such a statement must be viewed as one of probable opinion. Pixie does not say that "certainly" Isabel was thinking the same thing but rather she infers simply that "maybe" she was. Not to stray from the point, but even if Pixie were to say "certainly", Ayer does not dismiss the possibility of "co-consciousness" and that, as such, there is no reason to believe that direct knowledge of other minds is not possible. The point is that Pixie, in terms of what Ayer is putting forth, is testing a connection of properties. Furthermore, in terms of Ayer's notion, we have no reason to believe that Pixie has not the properties of her own experience to logically make such a connection. Hence, we have no reason nor evidence to invalidate Pixie's proposition and, although it is only probable opinion, it must stand as a conclusion legitimately resulting from inductive inference. Says Ayer: "The inference is not from my experience as such to his experience as such, but from the fact that certain properties have been found to be conjoined in various contexts to the conclusion that in a further context the conjunction will still hold." Says Pixie: "because all of a sudden she stopped and hugged me, and I hugged her back . . . Then we went on . . . "

In his essay, "The Physiological Basis of The Body-Image", Paul Schilder makes the point that, with regard to the body, normally one can feel all the parts which are in direct relation to "the outside world". As Schilder points out, the relation of body parts to the outside world is dependent upon their connection to that world. It is thus the case that one's own relation to one's body is directly related to one's connection with the outside world.

Though one does relate to one's own body as one perceives the outside world, Schilder points out that how one perceives the outside world "optically" may be in conflict with how one "tactually" perceives the outside world. What becomes immediately significant in Schilder's *Image and Appearance Of The Human Body,* is that though object and body exist separately, there can be no clear line of demarcation drawn between one's body and the outside world. "Generally speaking," says Schilder, "impressions that are not brought into connection with definitive and distinct objects are floating without sharp borderlines in space." Here Schilder makes reference to D. Katz's concept of "space colors" which float infinitely in space without

having connection to any particular object. The point is, that through the existence of the body itself, we do not and cannot relate to our own body as being separate or different from any other object. One must experience connections.

In both Chapter One and Chapter Two of *Pixie,* it seems that Pixie has some child-like concern over the fact that her body parts may go to sleep separate from her sleeping as a whole. In Chapter One it is her arm, in Chapter Two it is her leg. However, in Chapter Two not only does Pixie's leg fall asleep, but she thinks it is someone else's leg, and as if this is not enough it "slowly swings" separate from her control.

Schilder points out that, when one is at rest, one does not obtain the familiarity with one's body that one does when awake, moving and in contact with other objects. In such terms, Pixie would have no reason to believe that the weighted object lying across her right leg was her left leg. Indeed in such terms, what is immediately obvious is that Pixie, through contact with some outside object, is allowed to perceive her right leg, and this thing, this object, what ever it is must then be separate from her.

In fact, however, it is her leg and not an object separate from her. The question thus becomes; where has she gone wrong?

In her brief thought that the leg which was on top of hers was not hers Pixie did not, in Schilder's view, make any error of perception. For as Schilder views one's image of one's own body, it is quite possible that in a state of non-movement or rest, one's sensation of one's own body is "vague", and non-contact with the outside world may even lead one to "forget" that he or she has a body at all.

What then is one to do?

Pixie says: "I pulled her foot close to my face so I could look at it."

Schilder says: "Only the immediate experience of objects gives them distinctiveness and clearness."

Thus, what becomes important is one's immediate experience of the outside world or what one may perceive at the immediate moment to be the outside world. Of course, in Schilder's view, since there can be no real line drawn between the outside world and one's own body, one may be wrong, and one may discover that what one perceives as a separate object is in actuality one's self, but one can do this only if one experiences it.

In summation, what we have here are two separate philosophers as related to two separate chapters of *Pixie.* It is a presentation of two separate aspects of two separate text book problems. However it seems to me, as I teach *Pixie* and the Philosphy for Children Program, I must ask myself: are they separate?

Bear with me for going backwards, but in Chapter Two, where Pixie's leg falls asleep, what is obvious is the possibility that one may not always be certain of one's own body parts. Now, in Chapter One, Pixie makes the claim that she is aware of another's mental process. Are not these two observations in direct conflict; I who, at one moment, does not know his own body, at another moment, makes probable claim to knowing another's mind?

Again, I must ask myself: are they separate?

My answer, via Ayer and Schilder, is: I think not.

For what brings them together, Ayer and Schilder, body and mind, is a certain concept of connected "experiences" and, furthermore, both draw on the reality of experienced "connections", properties of human existence which cannot be overlooked or cast aside.

In terms of both, what then becomes important as we educate youth is to provide, to the best of our ability, an environment in which every immediate experience of both mind and body are taken beyond the experience itself and incorporated into an experience of its own. In combining the two, I may not stay with either but is not one of my primary goals as an educator to show a unity, a continuity of process? And if this is so, what becomes immediately obvious from Ayer and Schilder is that I am obligated to provide an atmosphere wherein I am best able to encourage a familiarity with others and with oneself.

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References

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