

Identifying the Mind: Selected Papers of U. T. Place

*George Graham
Elizabeth R. Valentine,
Editors*

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Identifying the Mind

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Foreword

Ullin Place was in my opinion the true pioneer of what became known as the identity theory of mind (though Herbert Feigl deserves mention). His paper “Is consciousness a brain process?” emerged after discussions with me and C. B. Martin at the University of Adelaide. At the time, I was trying to argue against Place from the point of view of Rylean behaviorism, but in the end Place converted me. Place came to the department of philosophy of which I was head, as lecturer in psychology. He introduced scientific psychology and got a laboratory going. He paved the way for what after his time became a large and excellent department of psychology led by Malcolm Jeeves, whose approach was more physiological. Ullin Place continued to think of himself as a psychologist but I think that his true greatness was as a philosopher. The fact that he published his two seminal articles in the *British Journal of Psychology* delayed the recognition of his ideas by the philosophical community, but recognition did come. The present collection of papers will help to widen appreciation of his work, much of which was published in journals other than the most mainstream philosophical ones. Ullin did continue to think of himself as a psychologist, no less than a philosopher.

It was a great loss to the University of Adelaide and to Australian philosophy when Ullin decided for personal reasons to return to England. (I had first known him when he was an undergraduate and I a research fellow at Corpus Christi College, Oxford.) He became a lifelong friend, and on visits to Britain I enjoyed visiting with him and Peggy and walking with him to the North Yorkshire moors. It gives me great pleasure to write this preface and commend this volume of some of Ullin’s papers and also to express my thanks to George Graham and Liz Valentine for their work as editors; they deserve the thanks of the philosophical and psychological public at large.

Melbourne, Australia
June 2002

Jack Smart

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Preface

This book is comprised of what we regard as some of the best papers written by Ullin T. (U. T.) Place. Many of the central ideas found their original expression in “Is Conscious a Brain Process?” in 1956. However it was the publication over more than four decades of papers on consciousness and mentality, on the one hand, and brain and behavior, on the other, that permitted Place systematic development and expression of his views.

Most of Place’s papers were, however, in relatively inaccessible journals and scattered in spatial and temporal diffusion. This book is the attempt to rectify that—to make the inaccessible accessible and to eliminate the diffusion. Since the papers in this collection appeared over a span of many decades, containing uneven levels of productivity and periods of minor refinement and reorientation, it was no mean task to decide what to include and in what form. The topic of consciousness is regularly Place’s target, but his sights focused on mind more broadly and on topics outside philosophy of mind about which his philosophical views on mind and consciousness required him to speak and write.

This book is the product of complete and total collaboration between the two of us as coeditors. The listed order of our names is alphabetical (arbitrary).

Work between us on the project began in response to inspiration from a variety of sources, including the recognition that near the end of his life Place had wished to compose one or more books. He discussed possible book projects with professional friends, former colleagues, and possible publishers. The diagnosis of terminal illness, however, prevented him from bringing these plans to fruition.

Why us? How did we become interested in the project?

The first named of us, George Graham (GG), initially became personally acquainted with Place while he (GG) was editor of *Behavior and Philosophy*, which in the 1980s published a number of Place’s papers on B. F. Skinner. GG, though not a Skinnerian, was interested in the philosophy of the experimental analysis of behavior. Various philosophers including Charles Taylor (in an earlier philosophical life), Jon Ringer, and Daniel Dennett had written seminal material on either B. F. Skinner or psychology in the experimental tradition, and GG conceived of *Behavior and Philosophy* as, in part, a means to encourage more such work. Place, meanwhile, was looking for philosophers who were willing to discuss behaviorism without scowl or embarrassment. Place considered himself a *behaviorist* of sorts (see editorial introduction and chapter 1, pp. 27–28, for

clarification). GG was delighted to publish Place's attempts to nourish the journal with his reflections on Skinner's analysis of verbal behavior.

Place and GG became friends. To GG, Place was a model of an empirically informed and deeply committed philosopher. His creative allegiance to figures in twentieth-century philosophy of mind (foremost Gilbert Ryle) that by the 1980s had fallen out of professional favor GG interpreted as an act of intellectual courage to be admired.

Elizabeth Valentine (EV) had known Place for almost twenty years, largely through the History and Philosophy Section of the British Psychological Society. They had common backgrounds and interests in philosophy and psychology; and both became founding members of the Section when it was formed in 1987. Place gave a paper at every annual conference, convened symposia on the Section's behalf at national conferences, and served on its committee for a period. EV (like many others) came to appreciate Place as a friend and mentor, always able and willing to provide help and advice.

Our pairing of interests, GG as philosopher of mind, EV as a psychologist with interests in its philosophy and history as well as consciousness, matched many of Place's most central intellectual concerns. After his death, each knowing of the other through Place, we approached one another about collecting some of his best papers in a manner that would suggest, by virtue of its thematic organization, the type of book that Place himself wished to compose. This would be a book that represented the sustained and systematic nature of his thought. GG met over lunch with David Chalmers, the philosopher of mind and editor of the series in which this book appears, and Robert Miller of Oxford University Press to discuss such a book. In David and Robert, GG and EV therein found two persons eager to encourage the production of this collection.

In preparing the papers for this volume, we have made minor editorial alterations and corrections, aimed at clarifying the text. We have retained the use of the masculine pronoun in the earlier papers, largely for reasons of simplicity; Place was not averse from using the female pronoun when usage changed, as is evident from his later papers.

Birmingham, Alabama
London, England
October 2002

G. G.
 E. V.

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Identifying the Mind

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Editorial Introduction

Place in Mind and Mind in Place

George Graham
and Elizabeth R. Valentine

Ullin Thomas (U. T.) Place can justifiably be described as the pioneer of the modern identity theory of mind, according to which mental processes can be identified with processes that go on in the brain. He was the author of the first of the trilogy of papers¹ that established the theory as a defensible philosophical position.

Place offered at least two estimations of his paper's impact. One is humble; the other is uncharacteristically immodest. The one (Place 1988; chapter 7, this volume) is that his paper was an ancestor of the materialism that has become an establishment view in contemporary philosophy of mind. The other (Place 2002; chapter 1, this volume) is that the paper marked a watershed in philosophical discussions of the mind-body problem whose impact was comparable to that of Descartes's *Meditations*. In our judgment there is no doubt that the paper constituted a watershed, helping to set the agenda in the philosophy of mind for the next half century. So its impact has been much more than just ancestral, if less than the volcanic force among philosophers of mind of the *Meditations*.

Although almost all philosophers know this classic paper "Is consciousness a brain process?" (hereafter ICBP), published in the *British Journal of Psychology* in 1956,² much of the remainder of Place's work is little known, for a variety of reasons. He wrote no single-authored book, many of his articles were not published in mainstream journals, and he often espoused unfashionable causes. Place was more concerned to pursue the truth as he saw it than to court favor or publicity. This book brings together a selection of some of his best papers.

Ullin Place: The Person

Place was born (on October 24, 1924) and lived most of his life in North Yorkshire, where he farmed sheep and had an intimate knowledge of local archeology

and place names; he was also an expert on edible fungi and a model-railway enthusiast. He won an Open Scholarship to Corpus Christi College, Oxford in 1942, but his studies were interrupted by the war, in which he signed up as a conscientious objector and worked in the Friends' Ambulance Service (his mother's ancestors were Quakers). On his return to Oxford after the war, he became one of the first cohort of the new honors school in philosophy, physiology, and psychology, graduating in philosophy and psychology in 1949. The following year he took a diploma in anthropology, for which he was always grateful for its adding a social dimension to his thinking. Formative influences from this period were logical positivism and its heir, ordinary language philosophy, under Gilbert Ryle, J. L. Austin, and Paul Grice. Place taught psychology at Adelaide, South Australia, in the 1950s, served as a clinical psychologist in the British National Health Service in the 1960s, and taught clinical psychology and then philosophy at Leeds University in the 1970s. He retired from teaching in the early 1980s, devoting himself to full-time philosophic research until his death from cancer on January 2, 2000.

Place was an inveterate conference-goer (typically staying in a camper and cycling to the conference venue). As Phil Reed (2001) recalls, he would take on anyone anywhere anytime in debate. He was generous toward younger and intellectually less able students and was always calm, tolerant, and courteous. His work showed great independence, originality, and informed scholarship. The equanimity and stoic courage with which he faced his final illness showed him to be a true philosopher. Ullin Place was a man of the highest intellectual and moral stature.

Place and Mind-Brain Identity Theory: A Short Historical Overview

The modern identity theory of mind is a version of materialist monism about the mental. Its central claim is that the mind (and its properties and activities) is nothing but the brain (and its properties and activities). By this is meant not the brain *simpliciter* but the brain in psychological operation. This means (among other things) that conscious events (pains, itches, mental images, and so on) are brain processes. They go on in the brain. It also means that we can learn about mentality through sciences such as neurobiology and neurophysiology, despite the logically independent descriptions of mind in ordinary language and of brain in neuroscience, as well as different methods of verification in those contexts. The theory is sometimes referred to as central state materialism or as the psychoneural identity thesis. These are apt labels, since mental operations are identified with neural processes.

Although materialism dates back to classical times and reappeared periodically from the sixteenth century onward, it was essentially blocked historically by the influence of Descartes's postulation of an independently existing mental substance. Place (1990) attributes the first formulation of the 'identity theory' to Boring (1933). However, a number of other philosophical developments were re-

quired before the identity thesis could be accepted. Crucial among them was the later work of Wittgenstein, Herbert Feigl's analysis of sense and reference, and Gilbert Ryle's logical behaviorism.

Place's (1956) statement of the theory, prefigured in Place (1954), was formulated as a result of discussions with J. J. C. Smart, C. B. Martin, and D. A. T. Gasking, which took place at the University of Adelaide in 1954. Feigl's (1958) view was developed independently, based on an earlier paper (Feigl, 1953). Smart later became converted and published a defense of mind-brain identity theory the following year (Smart, 1959).

Place's version of the identity theory restricted the theory to mental events (discrete occurrences in time), such as sensations and mental images, and formulated the notion of identity in terms of constitutional or compositional identity. Place claimed that brain processes constitute mental events in the sense that mental events are made up of nothing but brain processes. On his view, mental events described in ordinary language are described and explained scientifically in terms of brain processes. Brian Medlin (1967) and later D. M. Armstrong (1968) extended the scope of the mind-brain identity claim to all mental states (including enduring and nonconscious attitudes or dispositions), such as beliefs and desires (a move that Place opposed). Although a range of objections have been leveled against the identity theory (epistemological, violations of Leibniz's law, multiple realizability), the identity theory continues to exert its influence.³

The theory's influence operates at two levels. The first, metalevel, influence concerns how best to conduct the metaphysics of mind and is independent of actual acceptance of the identity theory. Partly because of ICBP's pioneering role, it is widely believed that scientific evidence is relevant to philosophical questions about the mind. Just how relevant is open to debate, but if one's goal is a physical science of mind, which was indeed Place's goal, it is assumed that the processes responsible for behavior are amenable to physical scientific description. ICBP's claim for mental event–brain process identity facilitated the search for descriptions of brain and behavior that permit entities characterized in two different vocabularies (mind and brain) to count as descriptions of the same entity. The journey from such characterizations to a physical science of the mind is complicated and contentious, but ICBP confronted some of its major challenges and argued they are not as damaging as once thought to be.

The second influence is at ground level—the level of ontological commitment at which it is asked, What is the *best* metaphysics of mind, assuming that some version of materialism is true? After a period of popularity in the 1960s, mind-brain identity theory was largely superseded in popularity by a position known as *functionalism* (Putnam, 1973). One of the main reasons for the development of functionalism was the claim that mental processes are multiply realizable. If the same conscious or mental events may be realized in various different kinds of minds, including alien mind forms and artificial minds, then they are likely to be physically realized in different ways, including nonneurally. Hence, mental processes cannot be identical to brain processes.

ICBP did not anticipate, because it could not anticipate, the popularity of functionalism. Nevertheless, Place claimed that it was empirically plausible or scientifically reasonable to assume that mental processes are identical to neural processes. The goal of defense of this hypothesis, he noted, is to ensure that it is not dismissed on logical grounds alone and to identify the hypothesis as able to be confirmed by further empirical research. The identity thesis thus became a source of inspiration as much as a letter of doctrinal metaphysical law and provided a basis for its own self-refinement and continued development. A number of philosophers (Kim, 1992; McCauley and Bechtel, 2001) recently have argued, for example, that the multiple realizability commitment of functionalism is compatible with embracing an identity thesis. The route to this conclusion is argumentatively complicated and not without dissent (see Graham and Horgan, 2002), but such features are characteristic of Place's original defense of the identity thesis. ICBP urged that the metaphysics of mind pay attention to scientific evidence—even if such evidence is complicated and contentious to interpret.

Although Place launched mind-brain identity theory, he was not, as noted above, a full-scope mind-brain identity theorist. ICBP helped to found a theory whose later developments he did not fully accept. This irony needs to be explained. Place was a mind-brain identity theorist about all and only mental phenomena best described as discrete datable occurrences and as in the head or inner (i.e., not necessarily manifested in overt behavior), for example, pains and itches. He referred to such phenomena as events. Place was not an identity theorist about what he referred to as states, such as beliefs or desires. He was a materialist about the mental, certainly, but a promoter of central statehood just for internal mental events. In the case of mental states, including, for him, propositional attitudes such as believing, wanting, or intending, Place was a disposition-behaviorist. He made this clear in his 1956 paper: "In the case of . . . concepts like 'knowing', 'believing', 'understanding', 'remembering', and volitional concepts like 'wanting' and 'intending' . . . an analysis in terms of dispositions to behave is fundamentally sound" (p. 44; chapter 3, this volume). He repeated his unwillingness to generalize the identity thesis from events to states on numerous occasions (see, e.g., Place, 1988; chapter 7, this volume).

Place never abandoned a behaviorist interpretation of states (or attitudes). Periodically throughout his career, he paid respects to Ryle, Wittgenstein, and B. F. Skinner for inspiring his behaviorist sympathies if not for the letter of his construal of behaviorism. Place contended that, although dispositions of a behavioral sort depend, causally, upon the brain, dispositions should not be identified with central states. In this he differed from Armstrong (1968, pp. 85–88) and resisted endorsing expanded-scope mind-brain identity theory (a thesis that became known as central state materialism). "Mental processes," he wrote near the end of his life, "just are processes in the brain. Dispositional mental states, on the other hand, are not, in my view, states of the brain" (Place 2000a, p. 30; chapter 9, this volume).

Armstrong insisted that behavioral dispositions can and should be identified

with their microstructural basis in the brain. Place counterargued that insofar as the neural basis of a disposition of a mental sort (together with its evoking stimuli or disposition partners in the world) causes the manifestation of a disposition, a disposition cannot be identical with its neural basis. This is because causes cannot be identified with their effects. Causes and effects must, as Hume taught, have distinct existences. So, a disposition described as unmanifested, as a type of neural state (as above) cannot cause or help to cause the very same disposition or state as manifested. In short, Place favored a species of what may be called a Divided Account of the Mind. The domain of the mental has two kinds of components: (1) mental events (conscious events and processes), which are brain processes; (2) mental states or attitudes (such as beliefs), which (for him) are dispositions to behave.

In Place If Not in Step

Though some of the specific positions that Place advocated are out of step with current philosophical thinking about the mind, in general his positions are not out of place. His preference for a divided account is one example, the general spirit of which is in keeping with some currently popular philosophical views. It is quite common in contemporary philosophy of mind to adopt a divided account of the mental.

One influential divided or two-component account consists in distinguishing between an aspect of the mental sometimes known as the phenomenal and an aspect known as representational or Intentional. 'Representational' refers to the aboutness of the mental. The belief that snow is white, for example, is about the fact or proposition that snow is white. Additionally, sometimes, as in the case of the philosophy of phenomenal consciousness known as representationalism, advocated by Michael Tye (1995), Fred Dretske (1995), and a number of other philosophers, the phenomenal is understood as a certain sort of representational content. Phenomenology is said to possess Intentionality or aboutness. To illustrate: consider the perceptual visual experience of red when part of consciously perceiving a red balloon. For a representationalist like Tye or Dretske, this perceptual experience is understood as representing the balloon (conceived as something external) as red. The representational content of the state is that of a red balloon. Phenomenal or conscious experience is said to embody a particular form of representational content. Sometimes this is called 'phenomenal representational content'. Redness as perceived in the red balloon is (part of) the phenomenal representational content of the red balloon perceptual experience.

Central to the most popular version of representationalism (that of Tye and Dretske, and known as externalist representationalism) is the additional proposition that phenomenal representational content is one and the same as external, real-world properties. Phenomenal representational content is not in the head. Phenomenal representational properties are those that conscious experience depicts objects as possessing and that help to causally explain the occurrence of

conscious experience of those very same properties. So, as the externalist position contends, in perceiving the balloon as red, the property of redness is an external, real-world property of the balloon—a property that helps to causally explain the represented presence of red.

Place would have endorsed some (but not all) of this. He would have agreed that mentality consists of two aspects or components. He would have agreed that one of these aspects is representational and the other consists of conscious or phenomenal awareness. He also would have agreed that representational content is not in the head. A major component of Place's divided account of the mental consists in emphasizing the nonneural location of representational content. Place claimed that states of mind represent, but he also claimed that representational content resides in dispositions of the body, and relations between special sorts of dispositions (foremost, dispositions to verbal behavior) and the social and natural environment. He did not—as noted above—equate dispositions with brain states. Place distinguished between states of mind (such as beliefs) that are representational, on the one hand, and mental events that are phenomenally constituted by the way in which they appear in experience (conscious events), on the other. He dialectically toyed with the idea of interpreting conscious mental events (such as sensations of pain) in terms of his category of the dispositional-representational, but he rejected this possibility. "Dispositional properties," he wrote, "exist prior to and in the absence of their manifestation." Sensations, however, "are not like this. They make themselves felt from the very moment" of their existence (before they dispose to behavior). It is partly for this reason that they are best understood as "one and the same thing as the brain processes . . . with which they are correlated" (Place, 2000b, p. 190–191; chapter 10, this volume).

Ironies with respect to Place do not end with the fact that he was not, fully or strictly, a central state materialist. Although Place conceived of the identity of the mental and the physical as contingent, in the theory as originally formulated, be believed that this identity could become analytic at a later stage. A contingent identity is, modally speaking, for Place, an identity that it is not self-contradictory to deny. (Place was not a friend of possible-world semantics, so he did not characterize contingent identities as identities that are true in some but not in all possible worlds.)

To understand Place's account of identity, one must be familiar with his philosophy of language and interest in sociolinguistics. An important feature of his theory of linguistic meaning and representational content is the claim that statements of identity of the type-type sort, expressed by a claim like "Sensations are brain processes," possess a conventional or socially relative component and must be contextualized to speech conventions and linguistic communities. Type-type identity statements are true (or false) depending, in part, on how the general (type) terms in the identity statement are conventionally understood by competent speakers. Suppose, for example, we propose that water is H_2O . If the proposal is made before competent speakers adopt the general convention of talking of water in terms of its chemical composition, such a claim as "Water is H_2O "

expresses a contingent identity. It is not self-contradictory to deny the identity. However once the convention is adopted of speaking of water as H_2O (and various other conditions are met) the claim expresses a necessary identity: the identity statement becomes a necessary (and in the language of philosophy, analytic/conceptual) truth. Nothing then counts as water without counting as H_2O . The process whereby contingent type identities become necessary identities depends, in addition to linguistic convention, on extralinguistic reality (the “various other conditions are met”), including cumulative empirical discoveries.

A number of philosophers, including Matjaž Potrč in correspondence with Place, objected to his claim that there are conventional elements in statements of type identities. The protest is that it confuses the question of the presence or absence of type identities (an ontological issue) with the question of how linguistic conventions change and affect classifications (a semantic-developmental issue). Place’s reply to this objection is that it reflects a misunderstanding of the proper semantics of both identity statements and general terms like ‘water’ or ‘sensation’. There was a time when “Water is H_2O ” was a contingent type-identity statement. At that time it was not self-contradictory to suppose that a sample of water might be discovered that did not have the chemical composition H_2O . However, once the identity statement becomes accepted as a matter of fact, it becomes a necessary truth that water is H_2O : being H_2O becomes part of the meaning of the general term ‘water’. For Place, the necessity/contingency of the identity of types or kinds of things (such as water or sensations) is a matter of what it is or is not self-contradictory to deny, given existing general linguistic conventions plus empirical discoveries.

Of course, positing a role for linguistic conventions in the proper classification of theoretical identities must seriously complicate Place’s overall conception of the role of science and empirical discovery in determining and describing the identities that really do obtain between things in the world. We normally think of identities between types of things (say, between water and chemical composition) as nonrelational or intrinsic facts about those things. This is especially the case in examples of what philosophers refer to as natural kinds (like water). Place pictures type identities (including type identities for natural kinds) as, in part, relational or extrinsic facts that essentially involve classes of things not considered on their own but whose kind or type status is dependent upon how sentient and verbal organisms (like persons) respond to and reinforce categorizations of them. If there is more to the modality of water’s chemical identity than water itself determines, and this includes contingent (changeable) social conventions for general terms, then not just the necessity of the relevant identity but, arguably perhaps, its fully objective or mind-independent existence seems to be called into question.

In the end, Place is less interested in the ‘intrinsic vs. extrinsic’ tension than in how to devise a plausible semantics for type-identity statements. There is, for him, a dynamics working at the level of classification that puts a theory of reference and meaning alongside an appreciation of the social nature and evolution of language.

The Empirical Side of Place

The philosophical relevance of empirical discoveries, and the mix of these with social conventions, occupied Place throughout his theoretical life, which, although he was a professional philosopher, began as an experimental psychologist and always included a strong social-psychological or empirical component. Although famed for his work in philosophy rather than psychology, Place held positions in both disciplines (sometimes concurrently) throughout his career, maintaining what Lewis (2000) referred to as a “dual commitment to philosophy and science.” He was a Chartered Psychologist and was proud to be a Fellow of the British Psychological Society. In his first post as lecturer in psychology within the department of philosophy at the University of Adelaide, he developed work in experimental psychology, establishing a psychological laboratory (procuring electrical relays from military surplus stores, for opening and closing gates in rat mazes) and laying the foundation for the subsequent formation of an independent department of psychology.

Although Place published no strictly empirical papers, he carried out a number of experimental studies early in his career, during the six years he spent working as a clinical psychologist in England. One investigated the use of behavioral techniques for the treatment of enuresis, in which he employed a caravan as a portable consulting room. In another, he tested Skinnerian and Rylean accounts of the relation between mood and motivation (operationally defined in terms of rate of responding) in a sample of manic-depressive psychotic patients. Pressing a key in the presence of a green light incremented a counter, whereas pressing it in the presence of a red light decremented the counter. The counter acquired reinforcing properties from the associated cash payments made at the end of the experiment. Place’s results showed a positive relationship between mood and motivation (responding being higher in elation and lower in depression) under conditions of positive reinforcement, consistent with both the Skinnerian and Rylean accounts, but a reversal (responding being lower in elation and higher in depression) under negative reinforcement, consistent with Ryle’s but not Skinner’s position. In a recent conference paper (Place & Wheeler Vega, 1999), these data are used to support Place’s behavioral theory of emotion, originally developed in the 1970s and seen as anticipating Apter’s (1982; 1989) reversal theory. Place’s theory offers an analysis of emotion in terms of two dimensions: hedonic tone (pleasant-unpleasant) and arousal (high-low) plus a third factor, the ‘performative impulse’, reflecting the environmental contingency.

Place was impatient with philosophers’ habit of unnecessarily prolonging debate and engineering the insolubility of philosophical problems. True to his background, he saw philosophy as a scientific linguistic enquiry, the investigation of scientific language using conceptual analysis. Place (1996a; chapter 14 of the present volume) discusses his view of conceptual analysis as an empirical endeavor, the empirical investigation of linguistic conventions.

His claim in ICBP was that the statement that consciousness is identical with a brain process is an empirical thesis. Throughout his life he pursued the issue of