

Reg. No. : 150/03

ISSN 0974 7222

PARISHEELAN

A Research Journal

Volume IV

Number. 3

Year 2009



Suruchi Kala Samiti, Varanasi

The Official Doctrine and its Relevance Today

Desh Raj Sirswal*

The intention of this paper is to introduce some contemporary relevance of Descartes' dualism with special reference to Gilbert Ryle's criticism. Ryle's explicit target in *The Concept of Mind* is what he calls the "official doctrine", which results, he tells us, at least in part from Descartes' appreciation that Galilean methods of scientific discovery were fit to provide mechanical explanations for every occupant of space, together with Descartes' conviction that the mental could not simply be a more complex variety of the mechanical. Whether or not every aspect of the resulting "two-world" view is properly attributed to Descartes. It is familiar view, which has widely become known as Cartesianism in Anglo-American philosophy. It has distinctive ontological and epistemological commitments.

Although Ryle published on a wide range of topics in philosophy (notably in the history of philosophy and in philosophy of language), including a series of lectures centered on philosophical dilemmas, and a series of articles on the concept of thinking, *The Concept of Mind* remains his best known and most important work. Through this work, Ryle is thought to have accomplished two major tasks. First, he was seen to have put the final nail in the coffin of Cartesian dualism (a particular caricature of which he is responsible for creating). Second, as he himself anticipated, he is thought to have argued on behalf of, and suggested as dualism's replacement, the doctrine known as philosophical (and sometimes analytical) behaviourism. Sometimes known as an "ordinary language", sometimes as an "analytic", philosopher, Ryle—even when mentioned in the same breath as Wittgenstein and his followers—is considered to be on a different, somewhat idiosyncratic (and difficult to characterise), philosophical track.

Ryle argues that the traditional approach to the relation of mind and body assumes that there is a basic distinction between Mind and Matter. According to him this assumption is a basic 'category mistake', because it attempts to analyze the relation between mind and body as if they were terms of the same logical category. Furthermore, Ryle argues that traditional Idealism makes a basic 'category-mistake' by trying to reduce physical

* Research Scholar (ICPR-JRF), Department of Philosophy, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra-136119

Parisheelan

reality to the same status as mental reality, and that materialism makes a basic 'category-mistake' by trying to reduce mental reality to the same status as physical reality.

Ryle rejects Descartes' dualistic theory of the relation between mind and body. Ryle explains that this doctrine is an example of the myth that mental acts are distinct from physical acts, and of the myth that there is a mental world which is distinct from the physical world. This doctrine of separation between mind and body is referred to by Ryle as "the dogma of the ghost in the machine." Ryle argues that there is no ghostly, invisible entity called 'the mind' inside a mechanical apparatus called 'the body'. The workings of the mind are not distinct from the sections of the body, but are conceptualized as a way of explaining the action of the body.

Ryle describes Descartes dualism as "the official doctrine"—the view he ridicules as "the myth of the ghost in the machine". In this paper an attempt to show that "official doctrine" is dead in only one of its ontological aspects: substance dualism¹ may well have been repudiated but property dualism² still claims a number of contemporary defenders. Indeed, both non-reductive and reductive physicalists are entangled in metaphysical overgrowth whose roots are firmly established in the soil of official doctrine. The problem of finding a place for the mental in the physical world, of accommodating the causal power of the mental, and of accounting for the phenomenal aspects of consciousness are all live problems in the philosophy of mind today because they share some combination of the doctrine's ontological and epistemological assumptions. So the time has come to pay new attention to Ryle's little understood "dissolution" of the mind-body problem.

Many of the idioms within the twentieth century philosophies using such philosophical analysis, the analysis are of concepts, mapping the logical geography of concepts, category-mistake, dispositional analysis, adverbial analysis, and systematically misleading expressions, which were first coined by Ryle. But here are some objections about the behaviourism in philosophy.³

Firstly, Philosophical Behaviourism faces the objection that it raises a worry concerning first person authority. It explains our knowledge of other people's mental states by viewing these as behavioural dispositions. But this third-person account of knowledge of minds leads to a related

The Official Doctrine and its Relevance Today

difficulty: How do we know our own mental states? If these were really behavioural dispositions, then we should know our own minds primarily by observing our own behaviour. But this seems to be plainly false. Instead, there seems to be a kind of privileged accesses to our own mental states.

There is a second objection saying that Philosophical Behaviourism ignores the essential phenomenal character of many mental phenomena. Is it credible that mental phenomena like pains or sensations of warmth are mere dispositions to behave? Most laymen and many philosophers do not think so. Instead, there is a nagging intuition that there is definitely more to a pain than just being disposed to whine and groan, say that one is in pain, go to the doctor, and take some pills, etc. This objection naturally leads to a view (e.g. the Identity Theory) as defended in that understands sensations as manifest inner which cause things like my whining and groaning.

And the third, objection, may be the strongest one. It emphasizes the conceptual interdependence of many intentional expressions as a fundamental obstacle to analyzing mental states solely in terms of behavioural dispositions.⁴ This last objection naturally leads to Analytical Functionalism which is another classical materialist position concerning the mind body problem. What seems to have gone wrong in analyzing mental phenomena as a mere behavioural dispositions is to logical behaviourist's ignorance of conceptual relations between mental concepts themselves.

The chaff of philosophical versions of behaviourism has long been discarded while the wheat has been appropriated by the philosophical doctrine of functionalism. Functionalism in one of its many forms is widely accepted in the philosophy of mind today (and it gains one part of its appeal by appearing as the best philosophical articulation of underlying assumptions in the cognitive sciences). It is a view that is thought to have saved the "reality" of the mental from the "eliminativist" or "fictionalist" tendencies of behaviourism while acknowledging the insight (often attributed to Ryle) that the mental is importantly related to behavioural output or response (as well as to stimulus or input).

The ontological commitment of the view is that there are two different kinds of things, body and mind, that are somehow harnessed together. The one exists in space and is subject to mechanical or physical laws and the other one is not in space and is not subject to these laws. And yet the mind and body influence each other. "What the mind wills, the

Parisheelan

legs, arms and the tongue execute; what affects the ear and the eye has something to do with what the mind perceives; grimaces and smiles betray the mind's mood and bodily castigations lead, it is hoped, to moral improvement.⁵ The view that mind and body are somehow fundamentally different or distinct, but nonetheless interact, leads to the philosophical conundrum known as *the mind-body problem*.

For contemporary philosophers of mind, the mind-body problem no longer involves construing the mind as an independent substance. But working out the relation between mental and physical properties remains for certain philosophers an urgent project. "Through the 1970s and 1980s and down to this day, the mind-body problem – our mind-body problem – has been that of finding a place for the mind in a world that is fundamentally physical. The shared project of the majority of those who have worked on the mind-body problem over the past few decades has been to find a way of accommodating the mental within a principled physicalist scheme, while at the same time preserving it as something distinctive – that is, without losing what we value, or find special, in our nature as creatures with minds."⁶

Today the mind-body problem is often put in the form of an inconsistent triad. The mental and the physical are distinct; mental events or states are causally efficacious (they causally interact with physical and other mental events and states); and physics is a causally closed system (causal explanations of events are completely describable in the language of physics). The acceptance of any two of these statements seems to require the denial of the third. Yet, each statement on its own seems true. Various solutions to the mind-body problem have been offered; most of them attempt to reconstrue the first statement to allow a mental difference within a broadly monistic, physicalist ontology. Functionalism, coupled with a minimal commitment to physicalism, is the most widely held view today, but how it resolves the mind-body problem is still in need of clarification.⁷

One may wonder whether Ryle's arguments against the official doctrine might also apply to those who have given up on full-blown substance dualism but who nonetheless still remain mystified how to find a place for the mental in the physical world. After all, even within the terms of the official doctrine the differences between the physical and mental were not only represented as differences inside the common framework of the categories of thing and stuff, but also, Ryle says, of *attribute, state, process, change, cause, and effect*. Not only were minds thought to be

The Official Doctrine and its Relevance Today

things, but different sorts of things from bodies, so were mental processes thought to be causes and effects "Minds are things, but different sorts of things from bodies; mental processes are causes and effects but different sorts of causes and effects from bodily movements."⁸ Minds were represented as extra centers of causal processes, rather like machines but also considerably different from them. The official doctrine, says Ryle, involved a para-mechanical hypothesis. Today, mental processes are thought to be special orders of causal processes, perhaps like the symbol manipulations in computational devices but perhaps also considerably different from them. Mental properties, represented as figuring in causal relations, are thought to be in some way dependent on physical properties, but with enough difference to accord the mental a (causal) explanatory role of its own. Is this a modern version of a para-mechanical hypothesis?

That a para-mechanical assumption was at the heart of the official doctrine, Ryle says, "That this assumption at the heart of the official doctrine is shown by the fact that there was from the beginning felt a major theoretical difficulty in explaining how minds can influence and be influenced by bodies. How can a mental process, such as willingness, cause spatial movements like the movements of the tongue? How can a physical change in the optic nerve have among its effects a mind's perception of a flash of light?"⁹

With the acceptance of at least minimal requirements on a broadly physicalist scheme, the particular problem of "occult" causation seems no longer a threat: at least if 'occult' is thought to describe mysterious conscious acts that "float free" from the physical world. But there is still felt to be a major theoretical difficulty in explaining how the mental can make a difference in a world whose causal explanations of events are supposed to be completely describable in the language of physics. The problem of mental causation may not be exactly the same as Descartes' problem, but it is nonetheless inherited by anyone who insists that mental properties must, on the one hand, make a causal difference and by those who, on the other, hand think that physics is a closed causal system. Just as mind-body interaction was a problem for substance dualism, so is mental causation still the problem facing the many varieties of (both reductive and non-reductive) physicalism.¹⁰

Thus two ontological aspects of the official doctrine – finding a place for the mental in the physical world and the problem of mental causation – still survive today.

If the ontological commitments of the official doctrine lead to the mind-body problem, the epistemological commitments of the official doctrine lead to a different one. According to the traditional view, bodily processes are external and can be witnessed by observers, but mental processes are private, "internal" as the metaphor goes (since mental processes are not supposed to be locatable anywhere). Mental processes or events are supposed, on the official view, to be played out in a private theatre; such events are known directly by the person who has them either through the faculty of introspection or the "phosphorescence" of consciousness. The subject of the mental states is, on this view, incorrigible – her avowals of her own mental states cannot be corrected by others – and she is infallible – she cannot be wrong about which states she is in. Others can know them only indirectly through "complex and frail inferences" from what the body does.¹¹

It is worth putting that Ryle temporarily aside and pausing to consider just what is sensible and what is implausible about this aspect of the official doctrine. There are, to be sure, certain mental phenomena for which something like this picture is correct. Consider one's report that one is silently humming a tune to oneself or one's report about the subject of last night's dreams. It would be difficult to deny that there are episodes (imaginary hummings, dreams) that these are reports about; so, too, would it be difficult to deny a kind of privacy which (in normal circumstances) makes the owner "authoritative" and "incorrigible" about whether or not such episodes occurred and about their character. Although Ryle does not deny such episodes as imaginary hummings, he seems to many (including his later self) to go too far in *The Concept of Mind* to minimize or downplay their existence.¹² I shall argue later that such episodes can – indeed, must – be acknowledged within a reasonable view of the mind, but in order to understand Ryle's attitude, it is important to note that the official doctrine does not merely acknowledge the existence of mental episodes of this kind; it takes them to be paradigms for all "mental states" or the referents of all ascriptions of mental predicates. That is, it assimilates all mental phenomena to these imaginative, or as some would say today, "conscious experiences". Not only is what you say about your imaginings and the subject of your dreams protected by correction from others and thus entitled to a special authority, so, too, is what you say about your sensations and emotions, and even what you say about your beliefs, desires, fears, hopes, wants, proclivities, and character-traits.

The Official Doctrine and its Relevance Today

But if all mental phenomena are to be assimilated to episodes like dreaming or the imagining of sounds and colours “in one’s head”, this raises a problem of how we tell that others have the right mental accompaniments to be credited with having minds. It would be possible, on this view, for others to act as if they are minded, but for them. To have none of the right “conscious experiences” accompanying their actions for them to qualify as such. Perhaps we are in much the same position as Descartes who thought it made sense to wonder whether these creatures are automata instead. The epistemological commitments of the official doctrine lead to the philosophical conundrum known as the *problem of other minds*.

The problem of other minds is compounded by even more serious difficulties given certain assumptions about the way language works. Proponents of the official doctrine are committed to the view that mental discourse – and Ryle is primarily interested in what he calls “mental conduct verbs” – picks out or refers to items that carry the metaphysical and epistemological load of that doctrine.

“The verbs, nouns and adjectives, with which in ordinary life we describe the wits, characters and higher-grade performances of the people with whom we have to do, are required to be construed as signifying special episodes in their secret histories, or else as signifying tendencies for such episodes to occur.”¹³

The problem of other minds was at centre stage of discussions in philosophy of mind in the 1950s before the mind-body problem commanded the wider audience. The problem is this: if certain aspects of the official doctrine are correct and minds consist of episodes that are only privately knowable, then we need to rethink our claim to know (with certainty) that other minds exist. The thought at the time was that this was an intolerable conclusion, so philosophers set about to show how the claim to have knowledge of other minds is nonetheless justified. But although no longer at the centre, the problem of other minds lurks in the background of recent discussions of “phenomenal consciousness”, which inherit the epistemological and semantical aspects of the official doctrine. Consider, for example, whether it is possible that a person may enjoy colour experiences within a spectrum of colours that is systematically inverted with respect to another’s and thus “really see red” even though she (correctly) uses the word ‘green’, say, to identify green things. Or consider

Parishellan

the possibility of “zombies” who are our behavioural duplicates but who enjoy no conscious experiences, and thus are not really conscious, have no sensations, feelings, or other mental states. Both (alleged) possibilities are thought to present a problem for relational theories of mind like behaviourism and functionalism which ignore the phenomenal aspects of conscious experience.

To be sure, the literature surrounding these particular discussions is not about the problem of other minds, or of how we would know that we were encountering a zombie or someone with colour spectrum inversion since it is conceded from the beginning that there would be no way of knowing. (Interestingly, this is no longer thought to be intolerable.) But the semantic/epistemological aspects of the official doctrine survive in thought experiments that require the existence of mental episodes that are only privately knowable and further construe these episodes as essential parts of the meanings of mental expressions.¹⁴

Descartes was contributing to the field of cognitive science hundred of years before it was officially established. He was a predecessor to the discipline of mathematics as seen by his coordinate system, a vital part of cognitive science, and to linguistics, as is seen by noted linguist Noah Chomsky implementing Descartes ideas into his work in his respective field. Chomsky applies Descartes view that central ideas must be innate to “how children quickly develop the ability to generate an infinite number of new, semantically correct sentences,” which is part of Descartes Cartesian philosophy. Therefore, there is no basis for the belief that the Cartesian mind is the subjective mind of the solipsist. However it is the irony of the contemporary philosophy of mind that the Cartesian theory has led to such negative reductions against it. It is because we are impatient with Descartes’ pleas for a non-causal and autonomous mind. Descartes changed the way rational thinkers believed then and continues to influence people now. It is fair to say that Descartes is as an integral part of cognitive science as anyone, despite the fact that he didn’t ever know it.

Here we have discussed about Ryle’s explanation of Descartes’ dualism and also about its relevance. Most modern philosophers have rejected the view that mind and matter are different substances, but many remain realists about the mind. In other words, it has become increasingly difficult to draw a strict, reducible identity between brain states and the mind. In response, numerous theories have been developed to preserve the unique qualities of the mind while avoiding the substance dualism espoused by Descartes. These theories include combinations and varieties of the

The Official Doctrine and its Relevance Today

following: functionalism, non-reductive physicalism, emergentism and property dualism. It is worth pointing out that despite being guided by an ideal of physicalism, most philosophers have come to recognize the distinctive aspects of the mind as, in some way, irreducible. The above discussion proves that the official doctrine has relevance in today by its ontological and epistemological commitments.

References:

1. "Dualism is the view that there are things or properties that are not physical in nature. Substance dualism holds that minds are a unique substance distinct from physical substance". Crumley II, Jack S., Problems in Mind, Mayfield Publishing Company, London, 2000, p.11.
2. "Property dualist holds that although there is only physical substance, there irreducible mental properties". *ibid*,p.11.
3. Suchutte, Michael, "Logical Behaviourism" in Encyclopedic Reference of Neruoscience, Spring 2004, p.03.
4. *ibid*,p.03.
5. Ryle, Gilbert, the Concept of Mind, Penguin Books, London, 1949, p.12.
6. Kim, Jaegwan, Mind in a Physical World- An Essay on the Mind-Body Problem and Mental Causation, Broadford Books, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000,p.02.
7. *ibid*, p.02.
8. Ryle, Gilbert, The Concept of Mind, p.19.
9. *ibid*, p.19.
10. "Physicalism is the view that only physical things and their properties exist; sometimes called materialism." Crumley II,Jack S., Problems in Mind, p.11.
11. Tanny, Julia, "Rethinking Ryle", 2006, P.06-07, Date of Citation: 29/11/2006.
URL<http://www.kent.ac.uk/see/philosophy/Rethinking.Ryle/pdf>
12. *ibid*, p.07.
13. Ryle, Gilbert, The Concept of Mind, p.19.
14. For further discussion see, Tanney, Julia, "On the Conceptual, Psychological, and Moral Status of Zombies, Swap-Beings, and Other 'Behaviourally Indistinguishable' Creatures", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol.LXIX, No.1, July 2004.