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## Ryle's Dispositional Analysis of Mind and its Relevance

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### Introduction :

*The Concept of Mind* is the best known and the most important work of Gilbert Ryle. 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. Ryle rejects Descartes' dualistic theory of the relation between mind and body. This doctrine of separation between mind and body is referred by Ryle as "the dogma of the ghost in the machine". Second, he himself anticipated and suggested dualism's replacement, the doctrine known as *philosophical* (sometimes *analytical*) behaviourism. This is an attempt of this paper is to draw outlines of his criticism of Dualism his dispositional theory of mind and how it is relevant in today's philosophy of mind.

### Ryle on the Nature of Mind:

*The Concept of Mind* (1949) is a critique of the notion that the mind is distinct from the body, and it is a rejection of the theory that mental states are separable from physical states. According to Ryle, the classical theory of mind, as represented by

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Cartesian rationalism, asserts that there is a basic distinction between mind and matter. However, the classical theory makes 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. This confusion of logical categories may be seen in other theories of the relation between mind and matter. For example, the idealist theory of mind makes a basic category-mistake by attempting to reduce physical reality to the same status as mental reality, while the materialist theory of mind makes a basic category-mistake by attempting to reduce mental reality to the same status as physical reality.

Ryle finds in this dualism a capital mistake, which he terms as a category-mistake. It confuses the category of mind with the category of body and thinks that if body is a thing, mind also must be another thing. If the body is a field of mechanical causes and effects, mind also must be another field of causes and effects, though not mechanical. The dualist forgets that mind and body are terms of different categories. Mind is just the way the human body and its brain function. Thus, according to Ryle, a dualist makes a big category-mistake by confusing the terms of different types to be terms of the same type. Mind and body are, according to him, further holds that it is improper to cojoin or disjoin the terms of different categories or types.<sup>1</sup>

Ryle maintains that his position cannot be either materialism or idealism. Neither mind is absorbed by matter, nor matter by mind. Both exist but not in the same sense. "It is perfectly proper to say, in one logical tone of voice, that there exist minds and to say, in another logical tone of voice, that there exist bodies".<sup>2</sup> As they do not exist in the same sense, it is ridiculous to frame a conjunctive proposition and say there exists mind or body (as the dualists do). It is also, for the same reason, ridiculous to frame a disjunctive proposition and say there exists either mind or body (on the truth of which materialism and idealism depend).

But though statements about conjunctions and disjunctions are improper. So statements like Mind and Body exist and Mind or Body exist are invalid.<sup>3</sup> Thus Ryle makes it clear that mind and body both exist, but they do not exist in the same sense. The Cartesian dualism took them as existing in the same sense. According to it, mind and body were both substances existing together in a human body, having their own proper fields of action. Ryle is against this types of dualism, and advocates forcefully that such a co-existing substance as mind has no reality at all. Such a mind he calls as ghost, and he is totally against the conception of a ghost in his body-machine. This mind is a myth.

Mind, according to Ryle, is nothing but behaviour of certain sorts. He explains psychological terms as behaviours are caused by mind. Man has many dispositions or bents or inclinations in him. He acts at opportune moments according to those dispositions. But these dispositions are not stored in an inner private chamber called mind. There are just the ways in which the public behaviour of men as dispositions. Any act which is to be characterised by a mental predicate must be the actualization of some disposition. Mind is a dispositional behaviour. There are some dispositions which always actualize in one way. For example, the disposition of smoking always actualizes in the act of smoking. But there are many dispositions whose track of actualization is not one. They may actualize in diverse ways. "Intelligent", for example, is one such unique disposition. Intelligent activity is not one unique kind of activity. It may take various forms.<sup>4</sup> arguing in this way, Ryle has tried to prove that psychological concepts of know, believe, aspire, clever, humorous etc. do not refer to secret activities conducted on a second stage called mind. They are disposition-words.<sup>5</sup>

The logical motives of the philosophical behaviourist are the most significant, for if the dualists theory is accepted, the familiar

logical puzzles are generated. There is firstly the problem of the other minds. How can we know that someone other than ourselves is dreaming, thinking or feeling pain if all of these are private activities which can be observed only by the dreamers, the thinker or the man who is in pain? The behaviourist account offers us a simple escape from the difficulties of the problem, and its attractions are all the more evident when we realize that at times we all feel, and feel seriously, that we can know another persons true motive better than he himself. The philosophical logical accompaniment is at fault, and that there is a need to re-examine these mental terms which, according to the traditional way of looking at language, stood for non-physical states and occurrences, so that we can see how people do in fact use such terms, and what in fact is the connection between the mental and behavioural aspects of their use.<sup>6</sup>

There is no ghostly world of mind. Mind-involving concepts mean tendencies leading to behaviour in appropriate circumstances. Mind is behaviour, as behaviours it is nothing secret. This is open and public. By observing our own behaviours, we can have a look into our own minds. By observing the behaviours of others, we can have a look into their minds. There is an open access into the minds of others as well as of our own selves. The dualists had so conceived mind that nobody on earth except the agent himself could have an access to it. Only the agent had an open access. The dualists theory had made another mind completely shut from observation. This has inevitably led to solipsism and complete ignorance of the minds of others. But neither are we confined to our own minds nor are we ignorant of the minds of others. Mind as behaviour is public, not private. This is what Ryle wants to establish throughout his book.<sup>7</sup>

The fact is that Ryles philosophy is of special relevance to philosophical issues of today, especially in the philosophy of cognitive science and mind, but also in logic and epistemology.

Given the issues of our time, Ryle is a good philosopher to plunder, and has become a good authority to cite. Before saying a few things about how the contributors to this special issue plunder from Ryle, I will spell out very briefly what it is about today's issues that make Ryle so relevant in my main research area.

### Relevance of Ryles Thinking :

Anthony Chemero discussed that in the cognitive science of the last decade (at least), more and more focus has been placed upon models of cognition which do not make use of sentence-like, internal representations. Highly successful research on connectionist networks, situated robots, and dynamical systems models have made it seem less and less plausible that the mind is a storehouse of sentences. Though the scientific benefits of this still-emerging view of the mind are many and quite obvious, it has wreaked havoc in the philosophy of mind, where hundreds of years of work has explored the ins and outs of the idea that thoughts are inner sentences. But if our best science of the mind shows that there are no inner sentences, how do we understand thought?<sup>8</sup>

Ryles explanation of the mind from *The Concept of Mind*, is of immense service here, providing a ready way to understand thought in the absence of inner sentences, as well as prefiguring many of the claims later made by cognitive scientists. Although the entire work is worthy of serious attention, I will mention just three related positions developed by Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* that have been re-discovered by contemporary philosophers of mind and cognitive science: the primacy of knowledge how, the intrinsic connection between thought and action, and anti-representationalism, the idea that thinking is not the processing of representations. These have been among the hottest topics in the philosophy of mind/cognitive science literature over the last

decade or so. Ryle, who is rarely cited on these debates, had set these positions out convincingly and in great detail, long before anyone had built a mobile robot.<sup>9</sup> Here, far too briefly, is how.

In chapter II of *The Concept of Mind*, called "Knowing How and Knowing That" Ryle goes to great lengths to emphasize that much of what we usually think of as thinking is actually the manifestation of skill. This view of cognition has been seized upon by connectionist cognitive scientists, and later by proponents of so-called "embodied cognitive science". It is in emphasizing knowledge how instead of knowledge that we normally that, from the point of view of today's philosophy of mind and cognitive science, Ryle makes his most important contributions. In Ryle's picture, theoretical cognition is of decidedly secondary performance.<sup>10</sup>

On Ryle's view, it is not internal happenings, following an internal set of rules, that makes action intelligent, but rather it is the way that action is performed. Acting intelligently is not doing two things, one mental and one bodily. It is instead doing just one thing, but doing it efficiently or shrewdly or successfully in the face of unexpected obstacles. So knowledge primarily knows how to do things. That is, most of what is normally called knowledge, is actually *skills*.<sup>11</sup>

There are two important things, according to Ryle to be noted. First, we can see that having a belief does not depend upon having an inner sentence. So this is an account of beliefs (and by extension other mental states) that can be applied to thinkers as described by connectionist, embodied cognitive science. Notice also that in this description, a belief that something is the case is cashed out in terms of (sometimes potential) actions. So despite the 'propositional character' of the 'belief', it actually depends upon activity, and not vice versa as has been held traditionally. Furthermore, Ryle offers a proof that it has to be this way. 'Knowledge that cannot be the basis of knowledge how. "The crucial objection to the intellectualist legend is this.

The consideration of propositions is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent, less or more stupid. But if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it would be impossible for anyone ever to break into the circle".<sup>12</sup> That is, as Ryle puts it "Efficient practise precedes the theory of it".<sup>13</sup>

To designate Ryle as an anti-representationalist Chemero again says the "intellectualist legend" that Ryle refers to Cartesian philosophy of mind, is just computational cognitive science. "Ryle explicitly claims that the mind is not a storehouse of representations which are somehow processed when we think or act intelligently; that is, like many contemporary proponents of ecological psychology, situated robotics, and dynamical systems theory, Ryle is an anti-representationalist. In fact, Ryle's *anti-representationalism* is an improvement over many of today's versions of anti-representationalism in that it is more than merely *anti*, more than a mere denial of representational theories of the mind (though Ryle's work also does that). As noted above, Ryle offers a full-fledged replacement for representational theories.<sup>14</sup>

*The Concept of Mind* was recognized on its appearance as an important contribution to philosophical psychology, and an important work in the ordinary philosophy movement. However, in the 1960s and 1970s the rising influence of the cognitivist theories of Noam Chomsky, Herbert Simon, Jerry Fodor and other neo-Cartesian school became predominate. Chomsky even wrote a book entitled *Cartesian Linguistics*. In philosophy, the two major post-war schools in the philosophy of mind, the representationalism of Jerry Fodor and the functionalism of Wilfrid Sellars posited precisely the internal cognitive states that Ryle had argued against. However as influential modern philosophers and former student Daniel Dennett has pointed out, recent trends in psychology such as embodied cognition, discursive psychology, situated cognition and others in the post-cognitivist tradition have provoked a renewed interest in Ryle's work.

Ryle remains a significant defender of the possibility of lucid and meaningful interpretation of higher-level human activities without recourse to an abstracted soul. His programme for collaboration in philosophy is admirable, and he has done much towards its realization. His expose the doctrine of ideas as mental objects is a positive constitution towards our understanding of Locke, Hume, Hobbes, J.S. Mill, Blazon, Brentano, Meoning, Husserl, Ingarden, Frege and Russell. His short study of Hume, his treatment of Plato and his account of the historical emergence of the analytic approach to philosophy is useful and enlightening, and what he says about logical positivism has its value.

#### Conclusion :

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 an independent mechanism which governs the workings of the body. The workings of the mind are not distinct from the actions of the body, but are conceptualized as a way of explaining the action of the body. Contemporary philosophers of mind and cognitive science find these three main themes; the primacy of knowledge how, the intrinsic connection between thought and action, and anti-representationalism, the idea that thinking is not the processing of representations. These have been among the hottest topics of the philosophy of mind/cognitive science literature over the last decade or so. It is the time to consider some new dimensions of Ryles philosophy, which have relevance in the contemporary world of thoughts.

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