DESCARTES VERSUS GILBERT RYLE

CHAPTER III
The dualist seems to face certain difficulties. The difficulties are: If mental states are in principle unobservable then how can I know that we are justified in ascribing them to other people at all? Even if you have mental states, how can I know that the co-relations between them and behaviour or states of the brain are the same in you as in me? How are we to describe the link between mental states and other states? If they are causal, how does the causal process operate?

As I have noted in the last chapter, a number of initially attractive pro-dualist arguments fail to establish the existence of Cartesian minds, as entities distinct from our bodies.

The dualist conception of the soul or self or mind is an immaterial entity distinct from body. Every human being even the infants in arm have both body and mind. Both mind and body are two different, individual independent substances. Body is understood or explained in terms of 'extension' while "consciousness" is the essence of the
mind. We cannot here say, for a while, that this dualist conception is non-sensical, for the dualist idea is that there are certain entities of a kind that are not recognised by physics (the science of matter): and it would surely be outrageous to dismiss as nonsense the thought that there could perhaps be more thing in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in the physicist’s philosophy. So here I am not going to damn dualism as meaningless just because it speaks of entities which are not recognised by physics, rather I shall concentrate first on the even more basic dualist assumption that minds are genuine entities in their own right.

While going by the subject matter, the first main question that arises is: What is it to be a genuine entity? To answer this question the dualist claims that Cartesian minds are the genuine entities in their own right, entirely distinct from bodies. In other words, it seems that he must grant that on his view it makes some sense to ask ‘how many Cartesian minds are associated with this particular human body?’ and also ‘is the mind, which is now associated with the body is the same one as was associated with it a few moments ago, or is it only (more or less) an exactly similar
The dualist respond to the question, 'how many minds?' by saying that there is one and only one mind associated with each normal human being. But the answer is still questionable as 'what entitles the dualist to this view?' while developing a variation on a theme on Kant, Strawson argued:

"Suppose I were in debate with a Cartesian philosopher, say Professor X. If I were to suggest that when the man, Professor X, speaks, there are a thousand souls simultaneously thinking the thoughts his words express, having qualitatively indistinguishable experiences such as he, the man, would currently claim, how would he persuade me that there was only such soul? (How would each indignant soul, once the doubt has entered, persuade itself of its uniqueness?)."

Here it can be argued that if minds are genuine entities in their own right then why can't there be many minds associated with a given body and thinking away more or less in parallel? Strawson says it is very difficult to see how the dualist could claim to know that his 'one mind' theory

2. Ibid, p. 47.
is true. How can one claim that his own mind is unique or is one of a community of similar minds attached to the same body? Experientially there is no way of deciding between the official Cartesian story and its fanciful 'many minds' rival. Now the question is asked: Has Descartes any right to insist that his tale is the correct one? And we see that the dualist cannot simply protect that a normal human being has one mind 'by definition'. It appears that his claim that a person such as himself consists of one body plus one mind now has a status of a rather chancy hypothesis which is at most a reasonable bet.

Difficulties for the dualist are now beginning to mount up which seem fundamentally challenging and yet also pretty intractable. According to the dualist view, an absolutely sharp distinction can be drawn between (i) being merely a physical entity, and (ii) having both a physical body and an immaterial mind. We human beings fall into the second category whereas stones, trees, etc. fall into the first category. It may be mentioned here that in the part five of the Discourse, Descartes bluntly supposes that animals being in the first category of mind-less, purely physical things despite the fact that non-human animals can perceive the
world around them and have desires for food and sex. Sometimes we see many animals with quite a rich mental life. Descartes opines about animals:

".....they have no intelligence at all, and ... it is nature which acts in them according to the disposition of their organs. (Writings 1:141)."

To put it precisely, Descartes argues that they (animals) are indistinguishable from automata. Here, Descartes' attempts to draw an absolutely clear line between us and the brutes by reference to the presence and absence of minds looks utterly misguided --- there just does not seem to be that sort of all-or-nothing different between us and other animals. Leibnitz protested that:

"....the opinion of those who transform or degrade beasts into pure machines ... goes beyond appearances, and is even contrary to the order of things. (Papers: 454)."

Locke wrote:

".....in all the visible corporeal

3. Ibid, p. 50.
4. Ibid, p. 50.
world we see no chasm or gaps. All quite down from us the descent is by easy steps and a continued series of things, that in each remove differ very little one from the other.... There are some brutes that seem to have as much knowledge and reason as some that are called men: and the animals and the vegetables kingdoms are so nearly joined that, if you will take the lowest of one and the highest of the other, there will scarce be published any great difference between them, and so on, till we come to the lowest and most organical parts of matter, we shall find every where that the several species are linked together and differ but in almost sensible degrees. (Essay III. IV ).

Here it appears that Descartes' own placing of a sharp divide between humans and all other animals is unsatisfactory. It would have been better if the dualist had replied that all physical things have incorporeal entities associated with them, so there is after all no divide anywhere between things with and without Cartesian components.

Another general difficulty with the theory of dualism is that how some particular immaterial event causes a physical upshot. In other words, similarly we can ask that how

5. Ibid, p. 50.
physical happenings can have immaterial consequences. In order to answer this question whatever tale the dualist spins for us can only mention further happenings that fall squarely on one side or the other of the great divide between physical events and events in immaterial minds. If we ask the dualist how the realm of the mind can influence the physical realm, nothing the dualist can say will make matters any way clearer. Descartes, though recognised and suggested that mind brings its influence to bear on the body in the pineal gland. But to specify the location of the putative mind-body interface is not to specify how the causal interaction is supposed to work. Here it seems to be a puzzle-creating and not problem-solving where we are faced with just the sort of complexity which cries out for further causal explanation and there we are simultaneously told that no such explanation is possible. And therefore, until we get a clearly developed response from the dualist which makes some physiological sense, it is tempting to agree with Ryle's blunt assessment to some extent:

"....the connection between [events in the mind and bodily events] is .... a mystery. It is a mystery not of the unsolved but soluble type, like the problem of the cause of
cancer, but of quite another type. The episodes supposed (by the Cartesian) to constitute the careers of minds are assumed to have one sort of existence, while those constituting the careers of bodies have another sort, and no bridge status is allowed. Transactions between minds and bodies (in order to be explicable) involve links where no links can be.”

It appears that the dualist theory of the mind seems to have a serious and intractable puzzle at its very heart. It is a fundamental principle deeply entrenched in the practice of science that the physical world is ‘causally closed’. There are no causal influences on physical events besides other physical events. This is not accepted by the Cartesian who believes in the mind/body interaction. All these already noted difficulties leaves the Cartesian model of mind in a hopeless state.

Ryle, for instance, sumsup his polemical attack on Descartes with the ‘deliberately abusive’ slogan: ‘Dualism is the theory of the Ghost in the Machine’.

Gilbert Ryle’s objection to the theory of Cartesian dualism

is two fold. Firstly, 'If a person says that he is picturing his nursery, we are tempted to construe his remark to mean that he is somehow contemplating, not his nursery but another visible object, namely a picture of his nursery, not only a photograph or an oil-painting but some counterpart to a photograph, one made of a different sort of stuff'. And secondly, '....... there exist a quite general tendency among the theorists and laymen alike to ascribe some sort of an other-worldly reality to the imaginary and then to treat minds as the clandestine habitats of such fleshless beings? The supposition that the body or 'machine' is inhabited by a self-subsistant non-physical entity the soul or 'Ghost' purports to explain action, sensation, thought, emotion and the will, it cannot, in fact, explain any of these things. Whatever difference is between a living person and a lump of inanimate matter, it cannot be that the former is inhabited by, and activated by a non-physical entity, for there can be no causal or other laws connecting the physical and the non-physical, so that even if the Ghost existed it could not activate the machine. Nor could the machine affect the Ghost. No interaction between them is possible and as an explanatory hypotheses, the existence of the Ghost is useless and absurd. Lets have an another
outlook, in so far as Dualism is a theory about the nature of human beings in general, it contains the seeds of its own destruction as an examination of Dualism shows that it collapses into solipsism, the theory that one's own mind is either the only knowable or the only existing one. There is no proof in the physical world, possibly serving as a reason that another mind existed or that the other 'machines' of human form which we meet contain 'Ghosts'.

In The Concept of Mind, Ryle has tried to reclassify the words and proposition we use in talking about the mind, words like 'feeling', 'emotion', 'thought', 'thinking', 'act of judgement', 'in the mind', 'reason', 'mental image', and as on. According to him, when we talk of minds we donot mean to refer to the mind as a special kind of thing or place where mental acts take place', a hidden source of all that people do as thinking feeling beings -- nor to mental acts of such a thing, or to events and processes 'in' it. To him mind is the topic of sets of testable hypothetical and semi-hypothetical proposition. He writes in The Concept of Mind:

"To talk of a person's mind... is

Before we go into details let me put Cartesian Dualism once again in the front. The official doctrine of Descartes states that every human being has both a body and a mind. Human bodies are extended; bodily processes and states can be inspected by external observers. But minds are not extended, the workings of one's mind are not witnessable by other observers, its career is private. Only I can take cognisance of the states and processes of my own mind. A person, therefore, lives through two collateral histories, one consisting of what happens in and to his body, the other consisting of what happens in and to his mind. The first is public, the second private. The events in the first history are events in the physical world. Those in the second are events in the mental world.

Underlying this representation of the bifurcation of a person's two lives (inner and outer) there is a seemingly more profound and philosophical assumption. It is assumed
that there are two different kinds of existence or status: some existing is physical existing, other existing is mental existing. What has physical existence is in time and space and is of matter; what has mental existence is in time only and is of consciousness. Thus there is a polar opposition between mind and matter.

Ryle speaks of the Official Doctrine with deliberate abusiveness, as 'the Dogma of the Ghost in the machine'. It is namely, a category mistake. It represents the facts of mental life as if they belonged to one logical type or category, when they actually belong to another. The Dogma is therefore, a philosopher's myth. In attempting to explode the myth Ryle aims at doing nothing more than rectifying the logic of mental conduct concepts. Category Mistake: A foreigner watching his first game of cricket, what are the functions of the bowlers, the batsmen, the fielders, the umpires, and the scorers. He then says, 'but I donot see whose role is to exercise esprit de corps'. Here it is to be understood that team spirit is not another cricketing operation supplementary to all of the special tasks. It is, roughly, the keenness with which each of the special tasks is performed, and performing a task keenly is not performing
two tasks. Another example of category mistake: John Smith and William Brown are both men but the average man is not the third man if someone believed that the average man was a third man he would be making a category mistake. For the average man, on the one hand, and Smith and Brown on the other belong to different categories of being. Similarly manifestation of the 'esprit de corps' is not another role on a par with these and if anyone thought these to be so, it will be a category mistake. In other words, so long as the person continues to think of the team spirit as an elusive insubstantial operation or thing, he will tend to think of him as an elusive insubstantial man, a ghost who is everywhere but nowhere.

Ryle's destructive purpose is to show that a family of radical category mistakes, is the source of the double life theory. It is a logical error to explain people's actions in Cartesian terms. It is a category mistake, that is to say, it is not a kind of mistake that can be corrected by psychology. According to Ryle the Cartesian category mistake is to confuse cause and law, or to classify as categorical statements which are in fact hypothetical or semi-hypothetical statements, or to classify as assertions
sentences that actually function as inference rules.

The main theory to consider here is that of Behaviourism, as a philosophy of mind developed as a consequence of the rejection of Descartes 'Mental Substance Theory'. Behaviourism is a term with many meanings. [Psychological behaviourism maintains that human body is a variety of material body. They completely deny the existence of human mind as a separate entity from the body]. In this chapter we are mainly concerned with Philosophical or Analytical or Logical Behaviourism.

There are many thinkers who donot have difficulty with the concept of the physical body, but their difficulty lie in the mental term of the alleged relation. The core problem here in fact is that there are expressions referring to the mental which have a different meaning and the expressions referring to the physical which have a different meaning. This is simply assumed to be the case and shown to be true and consequently, this assumption has been powerfully attacked in recent times by Gilbert Ryle. One of Ryle's main theses expressed in an extreme form is as follows:
"It is being maintained throughout this book that when we characterise people by mental predicates, we are not making untestable inference to any ghostly processes occurring in streams of consciousness which we are debarred from visiting: We are describing the ways in which people conduct parts of their predominantly public behaviour. Thus we go beyond what we see them do and hear them say, but this going beyond is not a going behind in the sense of making inferences to occult causes; it is going beyond in the sense of considering in the first instance, the powers and propensities in the first instance, the powers and propensities of which their actions are exercises."

Ryle in his famous book 'The Concept of Mind' has made a considerable attack on Descartes' Mental substance theory. Philosophical behaviourism as is advocated by Ryle seems to hold that the meanings of mental predicates must be explained in terms of overt behaviour or that statements about mind can be completely analysed in terms of statements about what other people can or could observe him doing. When we attribute some mental predicates to someone, we are attributing to him some kinds of behaviour or a disposition towards some behaviour or both. Now if we consider Ryle's assimilation to the mental to physical is legitimate or

valid, then mind and body are not different in principle, and thus the conventional dualistic theories rest upon a confusion. The philosophical behaviourist like Ryle assimilates all mental predicates to dispositional terms like intelligent or obstinate, noticing that their ascription to a person does not imply anything about his "current experiences".

Reacting against Descartes' belief that there are actions like doubting, willing, feeling and so on which necessarily require the existence of something, the mind, which acts. Ryle writes:

'....... it is one thing to say that certain human actions and reactions exhibit qualities of character and intellect. It is .... quite another thing to say that there occur mental acts or mental processes.

It will be an unfortunate linguistic fashion to consider something existing and occurring in the physical world and that something existing and occurring in the physical world is not something existing and occurring in that world but in another metaphorical place.'

Ryle, in his book, 'The Concept of Mind' sets out to show

10. Ibid, p. 130.
that there are no mental acts by examining psychological concepts but rather each falls into one of three broad classes:

(a) Dispositional Concepts, (b) Adverbial Concepts, and (c) Achievement Concepts.

The word 'disposition' literally means an ability, tendency, capacity, habits, liability to do certain things. Wherever we say that an object is possessing dispositional property, we mean that the object is liable or capable of doing or producing something. In other words, we are ascribing certain dispositional properties to him, when we call someone genius or considerate. However, sometimes we are mistaken when we ascribe certain property to an object which seem to be non-dispositional. For instance the colour of an object is a "non-dispositional property". Inclinations, motives, moods, and agitations, which are sometimes called mental states, are not really states at all, but propensities."

In his book, *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle gives a dispositional analysis of mind by holding that mind is simply the

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disposition of the body and thereby a person is not composed of two independent individual substances i.e. body and mind. With regards to disposition Ryle writes:

"When we describe glass as brittle or sugar as soluble, we are using dispositional concepts, the logical force of which is this. The brittleness of glass does not consist in the fact that it is at a given moment actually being shivered. It may be brittle without even being shivered. To say that it is brittle is to say that if it even is, or ever had been, struck or strained it would fly, or have flown, into fragments. To say that sugar is soluble is to say that it would dissolve, or would have dissolved, if immersed in water."

Going by the Ryle’s account it appears that dispositional properties are non-occurant because when we say that 'a glass is brittle' we do not mean that the glass is at a given moment actually being shivered. To say here is that it may be brittle without ever being shivered. A thing is said to be brittle if and only if, under suitable circumstances it shatters. The behaviourists like Ryle, use this feature of dispositional properties and define thoughts, feeling and

wishes, etc. not in terms of actual behaviour but of disposition to behave. Here it becomes obvious to note that a man who hides his thoughts, feeling, wishes, etc. would still have a disposition to behave in certain ways. And therefore, to attribute consciousness or any particular states of consciousness to a person is to attribute a disposition to behave in certain ways, as for Ryle, dispositional properties refer to capacities, liabilities and tendencies. In the worlds of Ryle,

"To talk of a person's mind is not to talk of a repository which is permitted to house objects that something called, 'the physical word' is forbidden to house; it is to talk of the persons abilities, liabilities and inclinations to do and undergo certain sorts of things, and of the doing and undergoing of these things in the ordinary world."

For Ryle, to talk of person's mind is to talk of persons abilities, inclinations, capacities, liabilities, etc. For instance, to be angry is to behave in an angry way: to be flushed, abusive, banging the table, trembling, etc. Here we cannot say to be angry is to have a mental state, something private. We should note that mental states are

names of particular pattern of behaviour and thereby the attribution of intension, desire, intelligence, excitement and fear and so on are to be understood as attribution of a disposition to behave in a characteristic manner in suitable circumstances.

Now, however it appears that the Rylean behaviouristic account of mental states suffers from some difficulties. The logical behaviourist fails to show how one can account for the way one uses one's mental states to explain behaviour. The obvious difficulty is, as far as our common experience is concerned, that there can be mental processes going on although there is no behaviour at all. For instance, a man may be angry but giving no bodily sign. To put it differently, to say that some one is trembling because he is angry would not explain anything, it being angry simply consisted in the behaviour to be explained. It is possible that a man who is angry, may think but say or do nothing. Again there is problem of accounting for my knowledge of my own mental states, as I do seem to know, at least in some ways, about my mental states differently from other people also to know about them in different way. It is difficult here for the behaviourists to say something clearly about this. In order
to meet this objection that there can be mental processes going on, although there is no relevant behaviour or in Rylean terminology, disposition to behave. The logical behaviourist like Ryle, argue that though a man who is angry, may not do or say anything but he has the disposition to behave in some relevant way. Similarly, the glass does not shatter, but still it is brittle. In other words, the subject is not behaving in any relevant way but it is disposed to behave in some relevant ways.

A man is angry but giving no bodily sign but he does have a disposition to behave. Here we can say that he thinks but he does not speak or act because at that time he is disposed to speak or act in a certain way. It implies, he could have spoken or acted in certain way if required. According to Ryle, one may be angry but still does not behave angrily because he is disposed so to behave. In Ryle's words:

"To possess a dispositional property is not to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change, it is to be bound or liable to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change, when a particular condition is realised."

It appears from the above view that to be angry does not mean to be in a state of anger. To possess a disposition does not mean to have a particular state but to possess a capacity to behave according to the need of the circumstances. Britleness is not be conceived as a cause of the breakage or a faction bringing about the breaking. Britleness is to be conceived only as the fact that things of that sort break easily.

Behaviourism is a profoundly unnatural account of mental processes as it is not at all natural to speak of one speech or action as identical of one's thought. The thought is distinct from the speech and action. It is thought, which under suitable circumstances brings speech and action about. Mental processes can occur even in the absence of behaviour. Rylean behaviourism denies this and so it is unsatisfactory as a theory of mind as it has tried to establish that speech or action, or behaviour in general, is identical with thought.

Let us now analyse the logical behaviourists' reaction to those cases in which it appears that an essential feature of the case, mental processes is the inner occurrence of something where we find the most plausible candidate
sensation, mental images, i.e. visualising a scene, and thoughts that I am watching television. Let us discuss first the sensation, especially a sensation of pain. A person will obviously feel pain when a heavy object fall on his foot as we see him turn pale, grimace, cry out, clutch his foot, jump up and down and so on and so forth. There is a sensation of pain. Now, the question is: Why do we feel pain? Because under given circumstances, it is just to behave so because we are disposed so to behave. This is what the logical behaviourists' analysis is. This analysis of the Logical/Analytical behaviourists involves many difficulties as it leaves out the essential feature of consciousness. It is the inner sensation which is the immediate cause of the outward behaviour of grimacing, crying out and limping about. This inner cause has been ignored by the logical behaviourists as one can imagine or feel pain so great or slight that there is no disposition to behave. Here it appears that feeling pain is one thing and being disposed to behave in certain ways is another. The feeling of pain in one's own mind may produce disposition to behave in certain ways but this particular behaviour or dispositions to behave are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for sensations. We can never say that the feeling
of pain and the behaviour are identical to one another. This way we find that logical behaviourists have tried to analyse all mental predicates behaviouristically.

As we know there are distinction between mental occurrences and mental disposition. Mental dispositions are those predicates which are applied to a person when he is disposed to behave in certain ways, viz hunger, love, feeling, hatred etc. To be jealous of someone to be disposed to show certain types of behaviour towards him or her. Then there are mental predicates like dreaming, imagining, thinking, etc. which are called mental occurrences and these cannot be understood completely in terms of behaviour or physical expressions. Ryle has committed a mistake by denying not only the mental substances but also mental events and occurrences. It is possible for a person to indulge in thinking without showing any outward sign for it. Here it appears as in the case of feeling, the reports of the thoughts are not translatable into reports of behaviour or tendencies towards behaviour. When a person says, "When I entered the classroom a terrible thought occurred to me", or "After watching a particular movie thoughts surrounded me". Here reporting of these occurrences of thoughts mean
reporting the occurrence of an event which took place at a particular time. Now it can be seen that occurrences and their physical expressions, however complicated the attempted reduction of the one to the other might, differ and are not identical in meaning. Thoughts are not translatable into reports of behaviour because reports of the thoughts are genuine occurrences and not overt behaviour.

Another difficulty with Rylean account is that, to say a person is vain is to be disposed to behave in certain ways. That is to say a person who is vain is disposed "to talk a lot", to cleave to the society of the eminent, 'to reject the criticisms, to seek the footlights and disengage himself from conversation about the merits of others. Here it can be pointed out that when a person is talking a lot, rejecting criticisms, etc, there are some mental processes going on in himself. Ryle ignored this fact and tried to prove that feelings and emotions can be described in terms of behaviour. The feeling or emotion can be described only in terms of the situation and thoughts which occasion them.

The dispositional account of mind presented by logical behaviourists, especially Ryle, is that mind is reducible
to behaviour. But it can be definitely stated that for every statement there cannot be behaviour statement or a set of behaviour statements which will be strictly equivalent to it. In other words, it seems doubtful, to give physical description for each and every mental act. For instance, the physical description of happiness or thinking if given, the listener will not surely understand these, however descriptive the descriptions may claimed to be. How one can give the dispositional analysis of the mental concept, say 'intelligent'. If the logical behaviourists say that 'A is intelligent' because A is quick in answering, fast in understanding, attentive, and so on. Are we satisfied with the answer? No, because we still have not got the meaning of the word 'Intelligent'. We already know that these sorts of behaviour are regarded as intelligent behaviour. Ryle is repeating the presupposed intelligent behaviour of some sorts but giving no clear meaning to the word 'intelligent'. This way, Ryle’s logical behaviourism or his dispositional account of mind can be said to involve the fallacy of Petìtio Principìi, i.e. begging the question. So, it would be instructive to Ryle to give other instances to prove his dispositional account of mind ensuring that they donot include descriptions like 'one is intelligent because one
is behaving intelligently’, ‘one is angry because one is behaving angrily’, ‘one is feeling pain because one is pale, grimace, crying out, jumping up and down’, and so on. If not, then Ryle should either exclude mental occurrences from his theory or should stop explaining them by expounding dispositional analysis.

Of the three broad classes of psychological mental concepts shown by Ryle, I have explained only dispositional concepts thinking that dispositional analysis of mind by the logical behaviourists was important to be discussed as the main focus of my theses is concerned around this. I would like to end up this discussion with a quotation by Paul M Churchland:

"In fact, philosophical behaviourism is not so much a theory about what mental states are (in their inner nature) as it is a theory about how to analyse or to understand the vocabulary we use to talk about them. Specifically, the claim is that talk about emotions and sensations and belief and desires is not talk about ghostly inner episodes, but is rather a shorthand way of talking about actual and potential patterns of behaviour ...... philosophical behaviourism claims that any sentence about a mental state can
be paraphrased, without loss of meaning, into a long and complex about what observable behaviour would result if the person in question were in this, that, or the other observable circumstances".  

As we have seen so far, philosophical behaviourism fails to give a clear account about our mental states by ignoring and denying the inner aspect of it (mental states). To have pain, for example does not mean merely a matter of being inclined to moan, to wince, to take aspirin, and so on. Pains also have an intrinsic qualitative nature that is revealed in introspection. For this reason philosophical behaviourism is hardly a philosophical theory of mind.