

Philosophy 1320: Theories of the Mind, Stern College - Yeshiva University, Spring 2007
Russell Marcus, Instructor
email: philosophy@thatmarcusfamily.org
website: <http://www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Mind/MindHome.htm>

Lecture Notes, March 12

I. Evaluating Ryle's behaviorism

The behaviorism of Skinner and Hempel was motivated by a desire to construct a legitimate scientific theory of the mind, while recognizing that the internal states available to introspection resist physical analysis and verification.

So, they identified mental states with external, observable behavior.

In order to account for mental states which did not correlate with actual verifiable behavior, Ryle supplemented the original behaviorist account by identifying mental states with dispositions to behave.

There is a range of mental states for which the behaviorist's dispositional analysis seems plausible.

Consider belief, as Ryle does.

To believe that it is winter can be imagined as the tendency to put on a heavy coat when going outside, to take the train instead of walking somewhere, to yearn for spring, etc.

Ryle portrays the analysis of mental states as dispositional as a "dull fact (almost) of ordinary grammar (p 197)."

But, the belief that it is winter can also be expressed as an occurrent thought: "Wow, it's winter."

Happiness seems also to have both dispositional and occurrent senses (which Ryle calls episodic).

Some mental states seem much more like occurrent states, exclusively, like the sensation of seeing a red object, or the experience of a sharp pain.

Ryle's dull fact seems more like a contentious philosophical thesis, if we take it as an analysis of all mental states.

In Ryle's favor, the dispositional solution is supposed to solve the problem of free will.

Ryle notes that the official doctrine supports both the problems of free will and other minds.

In the case of free will, whatever quasi-mechanistic laws govern the Cartesian's mental states, Ryle alleges that they will be deterministic.

Remember, the mental world is, for the Cartesian, parallel to the physical realm, and governed by parallel, analogous laws.

Just as our physical states seem to be governed by strictly deterministic physical laws, our mental states should, for the Cartesian, be governed by strictly deterministic mental laws.

Against Ryle's dissolution of free will, two points:

First, the Cartesian need not hold that the analogy between the physical world and the mental is as strict as Ryle portrays it to be.

There is nothing in Descartes' writings that says that the laws governing thought are deterministic.

Second, it is difficult to see how the behaviorist solves the problem, since even if there is no independent, parallel realm, the problem of free will persists in the physical realm.

More seriously, the behaviorist seems to over-reach in the claim that there is no internal difference which does not manifest a behavioral difference.

Ryle sneers at the Cartesian for his gulf between the internal and the external, and for what he deems a superstitious belief that the internal can fail to reflect the external, p 194.

Is it possible, though, for people to have internal mental states which are not manifested in behavior or dispositions to behave?

If so, then Ryle's behaviorism still does not suffice.

We will return to a more careful defense of the claim that mental states are superfluous, that mental states play no role in science, by Richard Rorty, and Daniel Dennett.

Lastly, Ryle's solution allows for both the sentences 'Bodies exist' and 'Minds exist' to be true.

In first-order logic:

$\exists xMx$

$\exists xBx$

The rule of conjunction (and that of disjunction) allows us to combine the two sentences, so:

$\exists xMx \cdot \exists xBx$

But, Ryle thinks that this combination is illegitimate, due to the category error.

So, there must be two different senses of exist, represented by two different quantifiers.

$\exists_1 xMx \cdot \exists_2 xBx$

The idea that there are two different senses of existence is not necessarily crazy.

Some philosophers have argued that mathematical existence is distinct from physical existence.

Still, the suggestion has been generally dismissed; see W.V. Quine, "On What There Is".

Quine argues that the logical tools, which allow conjunction, are the best tools for settling metaphysical questions, like those of the mind/body distinction.

If it is legitimate to say both that minds exist and bodies exist, then it must be legitimate to conjoin them.

Note, that there is no significant problem in asserting the conjunction of 'there are left-handed gloves' and 'there are pairs of gloves'; nor of 'there are libraries' and 'there are universities'.

Ryle says that statements like this are just bad jokes, p 195, but his claim seems wrong.

The difference is not in logical tone, but in the meanings of the terms involved, like 'rising' in his example.

But, what difference is there in the meaning of 'exists' in the statements, 'minds exist' and 'bodies exist'?

II. Mental states and brain states

Behaviorism was the first of the contemporary materialist programs we will examine.

The behaviorists were mainly criticized for ignoring, or denigrating, the internal workings of the mind.

Additionally, neuroscience seems to imply that some understanding of the brain is relevant to our understanding of minds.

For example, consider [transcranial magnetic stimulation](#) (TMS).

By stimulating neurons, we can alleviate depression in some patients.

That is, we can change people's mental states merely by massaging their brains.

This seems like evidence that the workings of the brain are in some deep way related to our mental states.

Of course, punching me in the gut will affect my mental states, as well.

But, the brain seems to have a deeper causal connection with my mental states.

In this section of the course, Armstrong presents reasons to explore mental states within physical science, as opposed to within an independent, introspective psychology, or to stopping with mere behavior.

Smart works out the program in detail, as an identity theory.

And Kripke provides an influential criticism of the identity theory.

III. Mental states as causes of behavior

The behaviorist identified mental states with behavior, or dispositions to behave.

So, pain is not an introspective state, but the disposition to scream, cry, wince, etc.

Ryle's account mitigated the problem of describing mental states with no attached behavior, since I can be in pain but not scream or wince.

But, Ryle maintained that any mental state must be identified with at least some disposition to behave.

Armstrong repeats the criticism that the behaviorist can not account for mental states with no attached behavior.

Ryle has not really solved the problem, since a disposition is not a cause or a factor.

According to the dispositional theory, I don't cry because I am sad; my sadness is the disposition to cry.

I don't say that the apple looks red because I see red.

My seeing red just is my statement, and other related behaviors.

Even for the dispositional behaviorist, the question of why I scream when I am in pain remains without an internal account.

Armstrong, instead, interprets mental states, naturally, like the dualist, as causes of behavior.

"If somebody speaks and acts in certain ways it is natural to speak of this speech and action as the *expression* of his thought (p 228)."

We might think of behavior as caused by thought, but not as identical with it, or constitutive of it.

Still, Armstrong agrees with the behaviorist that mental states are linked to behavior.

He defines, or picks out, mental states in terms of the behaviors they cause.

A mental state is "a state of the person apt for producing certain ranges of behavior (p 230)."

Given Armstrong's definition of a mental state, it is just good methodology to examine the state of the person.

IV. An aside on dualism

Armstrong's definition of a mental state does not rule out dualism.

For, the inner state could be a state of a non-physical substance.

Armstrong claims that it synthesizes the inner states of dualism with the outer behavior of physicalism.

But, if we adopt Armstrong's synthetic view, we are unlikely to pursue dualism.

For, we are looking now for causes of behavior, which we are unlikely to find in the immaterial, non-causal realm of the mental.

Once we are looking for causes, we are in the physical realm, since the problems of causation for the dualist seem insuperable.

V. Identity theory

We have seen that mental states divide roughly into two classes: occurrent sensations like pain or seeing red, and intentional states like belief and desire.

Armstrong's account of mental states works best for intentional states.

My belief that it is cold outside neatly explains my coat-and-hat-donning behavior.

Smart focuses on sensations, rather than intentions, in particular pain, and an after-image.

Smart's claim is that every mental state is strictly identical with a physical state.

Thus, we call his position identity theory.

(It is sometimes called brain-state theory, e.g. by Putnam.)

Smart's identity theory simply claims that sensations are brain processes.

Note that Smart claims that the identities of mental states with brain states are contingent, p 235 and p 236.