

Philosophy 1320: Theories of the Mind, Stern College - Yeshiva University, Spring 2007  
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## I. Plato's argument from recollection, revisited

In reading some of the first papers, it occurred to me that Plato's argument from recollection was a little bit misleading, in that it refers to two different kinds of recollection.

I take Plato's argument to be as follows:

1. We sometimes recollect sensible things.
  2. So, we can compare two things in memory.
  3. Comparison entails knowledge of similarity and difference.
  4. Knowledge of similarity and difference require knowledge of equality.
  5. We can not learn equality from our experiences with sensible things.
- So, we must be recollecting our knowledge of equality, knowledge which is already in a soul which pre-exists our bodies and which earlier communed with the forms.

Notice that recollection appears both in the first premise and the conclusion.

Its appearance in the first premise, though, is eliminable, with no harm to the argument.

We can replace the first two premises with the mere observation that we perform comparisons among sensible objects.

No recollection of the first type, among sensible things, is necessary.

The key to the argument is the second type of recollection, which applies to our knowledge of the forms.

But, we finished with Plato a long time ago.

Let's move back into the twentieth century.

## II. Behaviorism and the redundancy of introspective explanation, continued

On Monday, I mentioned that the behaviorists thought that appeals to inner states create redundant explanations.

To say that some one eats because he is hungry posits two states (the hunger and the eating) when one would suffice.

Berkeley and Hobbes would agree with Skinner that there is one set of facts.

But, as Chanie pointed out, Skinner's claim seems false.

For, there is the mental state, of hunger, and the physical state, of the body desiring food.

Certainly, Descartes would posit two states.

Descartes seems right, here, and so the burden is on Skinner.

Skinner's argument is that reference to internal states is otiose.

"It is obvious that the mind and the ideas, together with their special characteristics, are being invented on the spot to provide spurious explanations (162)."

Skinner provides a range of examples: absent-mindedness, confused ideas, nervous breakdowns, shell shock.

All the examples posit an internal state to explain what seems in fact to lack a cause.

Insofar as such explanations lack scientific, neurological basis, Skinner is right that they are spurious. Or, perhaps better, they seem unsubstantiated.

Additionally, parsimony is in the behaviorist's favor.

If we really could predict all of a person's behavior without reference to introspective mental states, then we could at least eliminate them from behavioral science.

The behaviorist's elimination of internal states makes his theory more limited in scope, though.

The question is whether the advantages in simplicity outweigh the losses in explanatory power.

Against Skinner's argument, there seem to be different kinds of cases.

Absent-mindedness does seem to be non-explanatory.

But consider, "He screamed because he was in pain," as a result of a piano falling on his foot.

The pain seems to be an essential element of the explanation.

If the piano, for some reason, did not cause any pain, there would be no reason for the scream.

Pain seems to be a different kind of term from absent-mindedness.

It seems to refer to something really causally efficacious.

Here is another way to put the question for Skinner: are inner states the causes of behavior, or identical to them?

Do we think before we speak, or does our ascription of thought reflect only how we would have spoken?

### III. Troubles for behaviorism

Skinner argues for behaviorism because observable behavior is available for scientific analysis.

But, what if internal states were available for scientific analysis, too?

This question could be interpreted in two ways.

One, what if brains and their states were available for scrutiny?

Two, what if mental states were available for scrutiny?

Against the first suggestion, Skinner argues that detailed neurological information would be useless, p 161.

But, Skinner provides no evidence that neurological information is irrelevant to explanations of behavior. And the evidence seems to favor at least some neurological explanations.

We can affect how people think and behave by stimulating different areas of their brains.

For example, psychiatrists are using transcranial magnetic stimulation to relieve depression.

The second suggestion seems even more damaging to Skinner's position.

If we could develop a sophisticated theory which referred to mental states, then Skinner's behaviorism would be doomed.

Is Skinner arguing against mental language, as he says he is?

Or, is he merely arguing against a bad science of mental language?

#### IV. Logical behaviorism vs psychological behaviorism

Hempel distinguishes his logical behaviorism from psychological behaviorism.

Logical behaviorism is a claim about the logic of psychological statements, that they are verified in the same way as other physical statements.

Since statements about the phenomenal aspects of my mental states as revealed by introspection can not be verified, they have no meaning.

The psychological behaviorist similarly denies that internal mental states play any role in predicting and explaining behavior.

So far, the two theses appear to be the same.

The psychological behaviorist may say that the domain of research must be restricted to stimulus and response.

The logical behaviorist accounts for this restriction, which Hempel doesn't even want to call a restriction, by claiming that any statement which does not admit of verification is not a real statement.

I will proceed by ignoring the differences between the two positions.

#### V. The compatibility of behaviorism and dualism

Skinner and Hempel were concerned to form a scientific theory of human behavior which eschewed appeal to the inner workings of the mind.

A dualist might be willing to accept their accounts of human behavior, but hold that mental states are real, nonetheless.

The behaviorist could have the domain of behavior, and the dualist can retain a mental life.

This would be a major concession on the part of the dualist, of course, since the dualist would be admitting that mental states would play no causal role in behavior.

Still, as far as the psychological and logical behaviorist accounts are concerned, one could maintain at least an epiphenomenal account.

Epiphenomenalism says that there are irreducibly mental states, but they do not affect physical ones.

That is, there are mental states, but the direction of causation goes just from the physical to the mental.

Epiphenomenalism is thus a weak form of substance dualism.

Ryle's work was intended to eliminate the compatibility of behaviorism and dualism, using logical and linguistic tools.

Ryle argues that the Cartesian account of mental states is false and misleading.

#### VI. Ryle's attack on dualism

Ryle calls Cartesian dualism the official doctrine, and argues its proponents make a category mistake.

In short, the idea is that mental states are just another way of looking at physical (behavioral) states, and not an additional kind of state.

Note how Ryle's solution recalls Aristotle's claim that forms are not another kind of thing, but merely another way of looking at matter, another way for a substance to be.

Ryle trots out the old mind/body problem for the dualist, but he turns a nice phrase.

He calls the dualist's mind the ghost in the machine.

He also labels the problem of interaction one of providing theoretical shuttlecocks between the mind and the body.

He adds a new criticism: among bodies there are causal interactions, but among minds there are none.

Science works best at describing and explaining causal interactions.

Since there are no causal connections among minds, there is good reason to worry about the legitimacy of the concept of mind.

Ryle also brings up the well-known problem of other minds.

Philosophers often say that every one's problem is no one's problem.

You can not criticize a theory for failing to solve a problem that no other theory can, or does, solve.

One might say that the problem of other minds is like the problem of knowledge of the external world.

A skeptic can always present considerations which might make us doubt what we believe.

But, failure to defeat the skeptic is no fault in an otherwise acceptable theory.

In this case, the fact that the Cartesian official doctrine leads to a problem of other minds might seem acceptable.

It does seem that we are just cut off from the inner lives of others, and there is nothing that a philosophical doctrine will do to solve that problem.

On the other hand, we might see a solution to the problem of other minds as progress.

## VII. The category mistake

To illustrate the idea of a category mistake, consider a person who looks at the library, and the dean's office, and the dorm, and then asks where the university is.

There is no additional building or office called the university; the university is in a different category than the dorm, or the library.

Similarly, if we look for team spirit among the players and coaches of a sport's team, we will fail to find it.

While team spirit might be an essential element of a team, it belongs to a different category.

(The obscure, "She came home in a flood of tears and a sedan chair (p 195)" might be replaced by a favorite joke of mine: "Time flies like an arrow, and fruit flies like a banana.")

Descartes' mistake, for Ryle, was to think that the mind is of the same category as the body, pp 192-3.

Since the body is a machine, the mind must be another kind of machine.

While the mind was not governed by mechanical processes, it had to have parallel processes.

## VIII. Ryle's dispositional behaviorism

The psychological behaviorist was concerned to establish a predictive theory of human behavior.

The behaviorists spoke as if they were replacing, eliminating, introspective theories of the mind.

But, as I mentioned, we need not take behaviorism as a theory of the mind.

The dualist can accept psychological behaviorism as a science of predicting behavior, while adding introspective internal states the behaviorist omits.

That is, we can interpret the behaviorist's theory as neutral regarding the existence of mental states.

Ryle defends a variety of behaviorism designed to eliminate its compatibility with dualism.

He wants to take behaviorism as a theory of the mind.

The problem with interpreting behaviorism as a theory of the mind is that there are mental states with no obvious behavioral manifestations.

For example, I might desire candy, but be very disciplined about my eating and so never eat any, or express any desire for any.

If we take the behaviorist's theory as an account of the mind, then the behaviorist unacceptably omits such mental states which have no effect on behavior.

Ryle avoids the problem of missing internal states by taking mental states to be dispositions to behave. Brittleness is the disposition to break when struck.

Happiness is the disposition to smile, or chuckle, or smile at a puppy, even if it results in no behavioral manifestations.

So, Ryle's behaviorism can be a theory of the mind without being as vulnerable to the behaviorist's problem of missing mental states.

Some dispositions, like brittleness, are amenable to simple explication.

An object is brittle simply if it breaks when struck lightly.

But, some people's happiness may not lead to smiling.

There are lots of ways my happiness might manifest itself.

Mental-state dispositions are not so easily explicable.

Ryle calls them indefinitely heterogeneous.

The important point about dispositions is that they are to be contrasted with episodes, with occurrent states.

Happiness is not a specific feeling, at a particular time, so much as a general tendency, over time, to behave in a range of ways.

## IX. Wittgenstein, an aside

Ryle's behaviorism is supported by Wittgenstein's considerations, in later work, about private language.

I did not assign Wittgenstein, but I put selections from *Philosophical Investigations* on the web site.

The sections I have posted include most of the sections to which Malcolm refers in his article in Morton.

Briefly, Wittgenstein's idea is that mental states are inherently social.

They depend for their identification on the language we use to describe them.

The language we use is essentially an organ of the community, not a private language.

Wittgenstein is generally interpreted as arguing, in the posted selection, that there can be no private language.

The Wittgensteinian position is sometimes called eliminativist, since it dispenses with mental states in favor of publically observable behavior.