

KEY IDEAS OF GILBERT RYLE'S *THE CONCEPT OF MIND* (TEXT 11) [PENGUIN EDN]

Item	<u>Idea</u>	Page
1.	The 'official theory', starting with Descartes, is that mind and body are separate.	13
2.	Bodies are thought of as public, but minds are non-spatial and private.	13
3.	We are supposed to have privileged ('internal') knowledge of some or all of our minds.	14
4.	But the transactions between mind and body are mysterious, and don't fit either scheme.	14
5.	More basically, there are thought to be two types of existence, both in time, but only one in space.	14-15
6.	While bodies can interact directly, minds are thought to be insulated from each other.	15
7.	Freud has added a hidden aspect to mental existence (the 'subconscious').	15
8.	We are supposed to be capable of 'introspection', direct observation of our own minds.	16
9.	We only know about other minds by analogy with our own minds and behaviour.	16
10.	We can even doubt whether other minds exist; our minds seem solitary.	16
11.	Words about mental activity are held to refer to secret private events.	17
12.	If the 'official theory' were right, our normal accurate use of mental terms would be impossible.	17
13.	This 'Ghost in the Machine' view results from a 'category-mistake'.	17
14.	It would be a category-mistake to think of a 'university' as different from its institutions.	18
15.	Similarly an army 'division', or cricket 'team-spirit' are aspects of armies and cricket.	18
16.	Interesting category-mistakes are theoretical (e.g. about 'The British Constitution' or 'The Average Tax-payer').	19
17.	It is a category-mistake to think the mind is organised like the body.	20
18.	Descartes was reacting against Galileo, and wanted the mind to have separate rules.	20
19.	He defined minds as <u>not</u> having the characteristics of matter.	21
20.	They are 'spectral machines', with their own non-physical deterministic laws of action.	21
21.	Descartes' followers assumed other minds were unknowable (although this obviously wasn't true).	22
22.	Mental and physical language cannot be conjoined to give two causes for one thing.	23
23.	Mental processes do exist, but they are not comparable or opposed to physical processes.	23
24.	Both Idealists and Materialists are confused about the nature of the problem.	23-4
25.	Bodies and minds do exist, but in different senses of the word "exist" (cf. the "rising" of water and numbers).	24
26.	Descartes was not the first dualist, and he did dislodge the inferior political model of the mind.	25
27.	Some behaviour words (e.g. "know" and "aspire") refer to dispositions and not episodes.	112
28.	We need to describe the world in terms of what we expect to happen, as well as what actually happens.	112
29.	It is a mistake to think that disposition words refer to secret inner happenings (cf. "force" in physics).	113
30.	Episodic words also have plenty of uses, but they do not refer to inner happenings either.	113
31.	To be a "cigarette-smoker" names a disposition, not an actual episode in someone's behaviour.	113
32.	Such disposition terms depend on episodes (of smoking), but some (e.g. being "elastic") do not.	113
33.	If a disposition word reflects a variety of different types of episode, there will be no equivalent episode word.	114
34.	Mental terms like "know" do not have a single corresponding activity, so the activity is assumed to be hidden.	114
35.	Since no one thinks potentialities actually exist, it is hard to see how disposition statements can be true or false.	115
36.	But non-factual statements (e.g. laws of science) can be meaningful, if they give hypothetical facts.	116
37.	A law is an 'inference-ticket', allowing logical movement from one factual statement to another one.	117
38.	It may be suggested that a law implies a new extra fact, namely a 'causal connection' between things (c.f. Hume).	117
39.	This is a misunderstanding of language, which thinks there are logical 'rails' leading from one fact to another.	118
40.	Disposition statements are not wide enough to be laws, but usually support conditionals ("if this happens, then...")	119
41.	Dispositions are inference-tickets, but they don't support empirical observations of open or secret events.	119-20
42.	Analyses of disposition words like 'can' reveal complex meanings, only some of which apply to humans.	121-6
43.	'Tendencies', 'capacities', 'liabilities' and 'habits' show different aspects of dispositions.	126
44.	'Know' shows a capacity to be right, whereas 'believe' shows a tendency to act in a certain manner.	128-9
45.	We can distinguish human actions from human events without reference to inner mental happenings.	130
46.	If a student 'concentrates' we don't mean there is an extra mental event, but an accurate report can be given.	130-2
47.	The same behaviour (e.g. piano playing) may differ 'because' it is fun (or done 'as' fun), or a performance.	134-9
48.	Learning is the acquisition of the capacity to do things, and hasn't occurred if those things can't be done.	141
49.	A referee giving a correct ruling implies being able to give a correct report to journalists afterwards.	142
50.	Confusions over mental events arise when muddling task verbs ('look') with achievement verbs ('see').	145-6
51.	If mind exists as the world does, it is assumed that we must be able to perceive it in some similar but infallible way.	148
52.	Direct observation by consciousness and introspection is offered as proof that mind exists apart from the body.	149
53.	Denial of this direct knowledge will mean that we can in principle know other minds just as well as our own.	149
54.	The word 'conscious' can often be understood to mean <i>discovered</i> , <i>heeded</i> , <i>awake</i> , and other simple terms.	150-1
55.	Philosophers seem to assume that while doing things I am also aware of the mental events of doing them.	152
56.	It is not thought that we are conscious to two things, but that the thing being done 'glows' with awareness.	152
57.	The origin of this consciousness is probably in the Protestant need for an 'inner light' of private conscience.	152-3

58. To deny consciousness is not to deny that we know what we do, but this is known by dispositions to explain.	154
59. No one claims that being conscious of something gives it any authority (though by the dualist theory it should).	154-5
60. Consciousness of something (requiring a 'light') is not the same as knowing something about it (e.g. thunder).	155
61. We make mistakes about our own mental states (e.g. dreaming), though this should be logically impossible.	155-6
62. If I am supposed to be conscious of my conscious acts, this will lead to an infinite regress of awarenesses.	156
63. We are said to be occasionally capable of 'introspection', which is private, uses no organs, and is always perfect.	157
64. Introspection requires double attention, which might be possible, but not on all occasions.	158
65. Psychologists used to rely on introspection, but the evidence it finds is conflicting or non-existent.	158-9
66. We cannot introspect panic, anger, or enjoying a joke, but we are not more ignorant of those states than others.	159
67. We can allow the existence of <i>retrospection</i> , which does not need multiple layers of thought, or a cool mind.	159
68. Retrospection is no different in principle from observing any of my physical behaviour.	160
69. My mind is "my ability and proneness to do certain things", and not a separate part of me.	161
70. The use of the word "mind" leads to logical confusions, and it would be better to use "person", as novelists do.	161
71. I learn about silent behaviour (of <i>myself</i> as well as of others) by watching actions (e.g. a good chess player).	162
72. Part of the meaning of 'understood' is that your understanding (or mine) can be verified [Logical Positivism].	163
73. Consciousness without performance wouldn't be knowledge, but performance without consciousness would be.	163
74. Though a person's inclinations are more difficult to assess than their competence, the principle is the same.	164
75. Hypocrites, charlatans and actors are also difficult, but these are detectable, and depend on genuine behaviour.	165-6
76. Whether a person 'knows what they are doing' is also exhibited in behaviour rather than awareness.	166-9
77. In a chain of reasoning, or speaking a sentence, self-awareness is the ability to successfully complete the operation.	170
78. Most revealing about people are their unstudied utterances, but that does not make them windows into the soul.	173-7
79. Problems over the elusiveness of the concept "I" may arise from expecting that all pronouns have references.	178-9
80. 'I' is an <i>index word</i>, like 'today' or 'now', 'that', 'here' or 'this' [aka <i>indexicals</i>, or <i>token-reflexives</i>].	179-
81. "I" may or may not refer to my body, but you can't infer that a person is a committee of different items.	181
82. "I caught myself dreaming" contains two different senses of an index word, not two different items.	181
83. Different senses of "I" or "myself" are found in 'higher order' and 'lower order' actions, when I play two roles.	182-5
84. Several layers of higher order awareness are possible, and this is what constitutes 'self-consciousness'.	185
85. I can as easily make mistakes in higher order judgements of myself as of other people.	185
86. Full self-awareness is impossible, because higher order comments can be about everything except themselves.	186-7
87. We seem to have Free Will since we lack full awareness of our own acts, though we can know actions of others.	187-8
88. I can never foresee my next thought, so it must always seem mysterious and unexpected to me.	188
89. In talking about myself I am using public language, and turning it round to refer to myself [<i>no Private Language</i>].	189

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GILBERT RYLE'S *THE CONCEPT OF MIND* (1949)

BACKGROUND

- **Empiricism and Science:** Ryle is a typical empiricist philosopher. He wants to explain things such as minds in terms of things we can actually experience (and possibly actually measure).
- **Introspection:** Psychologists have traditionally analysed the mind by *introspection*. Plato and Descartes describe the structure of the mind by examining their own consciousnesses, and even Hume's 'bundle theory' of personal identity is based on introspection. But this is not public evidence, and cannot be directly verified by others (as science requires).
- **Behaviourism:** Early in this century J.B. Watson proposed behaviourism, as a method of study and an analysis of mind. The **method** is to only study measurable public data (behaviour); the **analysis** will (it is claimed) show that all consciousness can be analysed down into behaviour (an extreme *reductivist* approach to the mind). The most extreme proposal is the possibility that thought could be analysed into movements of the vocal chords.
- **Logical Positivism:** Ryle followed A.J. Ayer in developing the Verification Principle in the 1930s. (*see the sheet on the religious language problem*). Ryle proposed that verification might be by **any** observer, and not merely by the speaker, which made the principle less strict, while still making it strictly empirical.
- **Dualism:** Descartes and others had championed the dualist account of the mind. Descartes' arguments are that the mind is unextended, necessary when thinking, private, unified, and thinking.
- **Other Minds:** The view that the mind is essentially private leads to the *Other Minds* problem, which is that there is therefore no way of being sure that other minds exist. I may be surrounded by a bunch of unconscious robots, so any attempt to say anything meaningful (let alone scientific!) about other people's minds is doomed.
- **Solipsism:** The most extreme problem which dualism seems to lead to is the logical possibility of *solipsism*. If the mind is essentially private, it may be completely cut off from reality in a world of illusion and fantasy (possibly created by a Demon, but possibly even self-created, leaving the mind totally alone).

ATTACK ON CARTESIAN DUALISM

- **Ghost in the machine:** Ryle simply accused Descartes of having misconceived the facts. Descartes has imagined that there is a 'ghost' inside us which works a merely mechanical body. He has not grasped that words like 'mind' and 'consciousness' label groups of behaviour, not actual things.
- **Category Mistakes:** - He labels Descartes' error as a 'category mistake', which is a failure of reasoning when a predicate is applied to something logically inappropriate. His three examples are thinking that a **university** is a thing other than its colleges, or an **army division** is not just a group of soldiers, or **team spirit** is something more than just the behaviour of a sports team.
- **Double Causation:** Ryle points out that if we have a mind and a body, then every human action will have **two** causes, one the result of the physical laws of the brain, the other the product of purely mental laws. (This point leads to the later theory of 'Anomalous Monism').

KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF

- **Episodes:** Current consciousness might be analysed into what Ryle calls 'episodes' of behaviour, which are events which actually occurred, and so can be empirically observed. However, a lot of what we think is in consciousness (such as beliefs and knowledge) never actually leads to any observable behaviour, so the theory must be extended.
- **Dispositions:** We describe people in terms of dispositions to behave in certain ways, meaning that they will do certain things **if** a certain situation arises. So their 'mental' state of belief, knowledge etc. can be analysed as potential behaviour, which would be observable if it occurred, and is potentially predictable.
- **Cigarette smoker:** Ryle's example of a disposition is cigarette-smoking. To actually smoke a cigarette is an 'episode'. But when we say that someone is a cigarette smoker, we don't mean anything about their consciousness, but merely that they have a disposition to buy cigarettes, or accept them when offered.
- **Knowledge:** A person 'knows' something if they have a disposition to be right about it when the situation arises.
- **Belief:** A person 'believes' something if they have a disposition to behave in a certain way when the situation arises.

THE SELF AND SELF-AWARENESS

- **Self:** the concept of a self is a delusion created by the use of the *index word* 'I', which is falsely presumed to have a reference
- **Self-knowledge:** this consists of 'levels' of higher and lower order behaviour. Higher levels are studied utterances about oneself.

ADVANTAGES

- Consciousness is now held to be totally public; I know my **own** mind through my public behaviour, as well as other people's
- The problems of other minds and solipsism, which arose from the belief in mental privacy, disappear.
- We can also give a better account of how our ordinary language works.
- Free will turns out to be an illusion, caused by the logical impossibility of examining the source of my own 'mental' events.

OBJECTION DEALT WITH

The fact that people can *pretend* to think or feel certain things when they don't is not a problem, he says, because such acting or fraud is detectable through details of behaviour, and it is parasitic on normal situations where mental life *is* behaviour.

PROBLEMS

- **Behaviour without consciousness:** acting and lying (though Ryle thinks he can answer that), twitches, Freudian slips, blind sight
- **Consciousness without behaviour:** total physical paralysis, transient impressions, intermediate steps in reasoning, pure qualia
- **Intentionality:** in addition to privacy, and the existence of qualia, intentionality seems to be a mental feature which lacks behaviour

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

Functionalism proposes that consciousness is not the behaviour of the person, but the behaviour of the brain. Thoughts are not actually physical, but are a group of causally related physical events. Objections to this (such as drawing attention to privacy, qualia and intentionality, and Searle's 'Chinese Room' example) suggest that the theory still hasn't explain the basic fact of consciousness