

**CHAPTER II**  
**BEHAVIOURISM**

## BEHAVIOURISM

In analytic philosophy, the basic philosophical question about mind or mental states can be put as follows:

"What does it mean to ascribe a mind or mental states to anybody ?" or "How are we to understand the meaning of psychological statements?" The difficulty in answering these questions seems to arise from the fact that there are two kinds of ascriptions of psychological properties; first person ascription and the third-person ascription. (That there are also second-person ascription of mental properties seems to escape the notice of most analytic philosophers). There are those philosophers who believe that third-person ascriptions of mental states are the more basic of the two kinds of ascriptions and that to understand them is to achieve the essential understanding of the concept of mind. On the other hand, there are those philosophers who believe that it is understanding of the meaning of first-person ascriptions of mental states that is central to our understanding of mind. In this chapter, I shall consider mainly what I call the third-person theorists as opposed to the first person theorists about mind or mental states.

The main theory to consider here is that of behaviourism. Behaviourism as a philosophy of mind developed as a consequence of the rejection of Descartes' "Mental

Substance Theory". According to Descartes man is composed of two substances - viz., mental and physical. In other words, it can be said that man is composed of two parts, i.e. one is private and the other one is public. Descartes' theory is something like human bodies are in space and subject to the mechanical laws, which govern all other bodies in space. Bodily processes and states can be inspected by external observation. But Minds are not in space, nor are their operations subject to the mechanical laws. The workings of mind are not witnessable by other observers. For Descartes, whatever is mental is private and the only way to know that one is in a particular mental state is through observation of one's own internal state. To say that one is in pain is to say that one is having a particular kind of feeling or sensation or that one is having a particular kind of experience. Therefore, for Cartesian Dualism mental states have an existence that is entirely non-physical. My feelings of exasperation are located in time but not in space and on their view my feelings are different in kind from anything that could be observed, either by passers-by or by neuro-physiologists. However, though one can never experience the experience of another person, yet one can know what another person is experiencing by observing his behaviour. Whenever I am in pain, I behave in a certain way and therefore, whenever I find another person is behaving in the

same way, I can assume that he also must be in pain for whenever I am in pain, I behave in that way. So the Cartesians maintain that thinking things and extended things are two different entities. But Descartes himself believes that sometimes mind can causally affect the body and sometimes the body can causally affect the mind. It is known as Descartes famous interactionism which can be illustrated with the help of a room and its thermostat. A room and its thermostat act upon each other. A rise in the temperature of the room brings about certain changes in the thermostat. The changes in the thermostat in turn affect the room, that is to say it brings back its temperature to a certain level. If this action and reaction do not occur, the thermostat, cannot act as a thermostat. The Dualist who is an interactionist, specially Descartes, thinks of body and mind are co-related like the room and thermostat.

However, the Dualistic theory of Descartes' present many problems : The difficulties are : If mental states are in principle not publicly observable, how can we 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 correlations 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 ? These are the problems which led the philosophers to look for an alternative theory.

One obvious way of trying to escape from dualism is to eliminate non-physical mental states by 'reducing' them to actual or potential behaviour. 'Behaviourism' is a term with many meanings. Within the

field of psychology, we find that there are different varieties of behaviourism stretching from J.B. Watson to B.F. Skinner and others. Their theory is known as psychological or scientific behaviourism. Originally the word 'behaviourism' is formulated by J.B. Watson which attracted widespread interest and considerable support from scientifically oriented philosophers.

Psychological behaviourists maintain that human body is a variety of material body. They completely deny the existence of human mind as a separate entity from the body.

There is another variety of behaviourism known as Logical or Analytical or Philosophical behaviourism. In this chapter I will deal mainly with the philosophical or analytical behaviourism.

The traditional "mind-body problem" is the problem of the relation between the mental and the physical in human and other higher animals. To ask about a relation presupposes two different things to be related. Many thinkers reject this presupposition and therefore the alleged 'problem' which is supposed to arise from it. These thinkers do not have difficulty with the concept of the physical body, but their difficulty lies in the mental term of the alleged relation. The genuine problem lies in the fact that there are expressions referring to the mental which have meaning and the expression referring to the physical have a different meaning. This is usually not shown but simply assumed to be the case. 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 inferences to any ghostly processes occurring in streams of consciousness which we are debarred from visiting; we are describing the ways in which those 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 of which their actions are exercises."1

Thus 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. If Ryle's assimilation of the mental to behaviour is legitimate, then mind and body are not different in principle, and the conventional dualistic theories rest upon a confusion.

Ryle in his famous book The Concept of Mind has made a considerable attack on Descartes' Mental Substance Theory. He ridicules the Cartesian view as the dogma of "The ghost in the machine". 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 analyzed in terms of statements about what other people can or could observe him doing. 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".

Before I go further, let me say something about what the word 'disposition' means. The word 'disposition' literally means an ability, tendency, capacity, and liability to do certain things. Therefore, when we say that an object possesses a dispositional property, we simply mean that the object is liable or is capable of doing something. To say that an object that it is soluble, brittle, or to say of a human being that he is genious or considerate is to ascribe certain dispositional properties to them. However, we sometimes describe an object by ascribing certain properties which seem to be non-dispositional. For example - when we talk about the colour of the objects, we seem to talk about "non-dispositional property".

However, Ryle in his book 'The Concept of Mind' gives a dispositional analysis of mind by holding that mind is simply the disposition of the body. A person is not composed of both a body and a mind. With regard to the disposition Ryle says -

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"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 shattered. It may be brittle without ever being shattered. To say

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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." 2

From Ryle's account it appears that dispositional properties refer to capacities, liabilities and tendencies. The distinction between the dispositional and non-dispositional properties is that dispositional properties are non-occurrent whereas non-dispositional properties are occurrent. Dispositional properties are non-occurrent because to say that 'a glass is brittle' is not to say that the glass is at a given moment actually being shattered. It may be brittle without ever being shattered. A thing is brittle if, and only if under suitable circumstances it shatters. It is because of this feature of dispositional properties that the behaviourist can use them in his analysis. So one can define thoughts, feelings, and wishes, etc. not in terms of actual behaviour, but of disposition to behave. If it is so then the man who hides his feelings, thoughts, wishes behind a poker face he would still have the disposition to behave in certain ways. Therefore, to attribute consciousness or some particular states of consciousness is to attribute a disposition to behave in a particular way.

The logical behaviourist particularly Ryle says :-

"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 world' 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". 3

For him, the attribution of intention, 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. Therefore, for the logical behaviourist, when some one is angry this does not consist in some private state, without physical location, of which he alone can be aware. Rather, to be angry is to behave in an angry way : to be flushed, trembling, banging the table, or abusive. Mental concepts which we commonly use to describe and explain people's behaviour signify disposition and not episodes. Mental states are names of particular pattern of behaviour. They cannot cause the behaviour in question. It cannot be said that the man's anger made him shout or that his pride made him stubborn.

However the version of Logical Behaviourism runs into a number of difficulties. In the first place, it is hard to see how it can account for the way we use mental states to explain behaviour. To say that someone is trembling because he is angry would not explain anything <sup>e</sup> if being angry simply con-

sisted in the behaviour to be explained. There is also the problem of accounting for my knowledge of my own mental states. I do seem to know at least in some ways about my mental states differently from other people, also to know about them in a different way. It is not clear what a behaviourist can say about this. Further difficulties arise from the hypothetical statements made by the behaviourists. The logical analysis of hypothetical statements itself presents great problems, and the behaviourist has the additional problem of connecting a hypothetical statement, saying under exactly which conditions the appropriate behaviour would appear.

However the version of behaviourism is open to obvious objections. One obvious difficulty is that it is our common experience that there can be mental processes going on although there is no behaviour at all. For example, a man may be angry but give no bodily sign. He may think, but say or do nothing at all. In order to meet this objection that there can be mental processes going on although there is no relevant behaviour, Ryle and others use the notion of disposition to behave. Their strategy is to argue that such cases, although the subject is not behaving in any relevant way, he or she is disposed to behave in some relevant ways. The glass does not shatter, but still it is brittle. The man does not behave, but he does have a disposition to behave. We can say he thinks but he does not speak or act because at that time he is disposed to speak or act in a certain way. If he had been

asked, perhaps, he would have spoken or acted. We can say he is angry although he does not behave angrily because he is disposed so to behave. Therefore, to be angry does not mean to be in a state of anger, whatever that might mean, but to "behave angrily" in appropriate circumstances.

Ryle says :

"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."<sup>4</sup>

From the above view of disposition it simply follows that brittleness is not to be conceived of as a cause for the breakage, or even, a factor in bringing about the breaking. Brittleness is just the fact that things of that sort break easily.

Although the Behaviourists in this way try to deal with the objection that mental processes can occur in the absence of behaviour, but they cannot do much. Because they meet with other objections. Suppose, for example, when I think, but thoughts do not issue in any action, it seems as obvious as anything is obvious that there is something actually going on in me which constitutes my thought. It is not simply that I would speak or act or if some conditions that are unfulfilled were to be fulfilled. Rather something is currently going on means, the literal sense of 'going on', and this something is

my thought. Rylean Behaviourism denies this and so it is unsatisfactory as a theory of mind. Behaviourism is a profoundly unnatural account of mental processes. If somebody speaks or acts in a certain way it is natural to speak of this speech and action as the expression of his thought. It is not at all natural to speak of his speech and action as identical with his thought. We naturally think of the thought as something quite distinct from the speech and action, which under suitable circumstances brings the speech and action about. Thoughts are not to be identified with behaviour. A man's behaviour constitutes the reason we have for attributing certain mental processes to him, but the behaviour cannot be identified with the mental processes.

Let us now turn to those cases in which it appears that an essential feature of the case is the inner occurrence of something, as we say, "going on before the person's mind", or "occupying his consciousness". The most plausible candidates are sensations (e.g., feeling pain), mental images (e.g. visualising a scene) and thoughts (e.g., having the thought, that today is holiday). I will first concentrate on having sensation, for example, a sensation of pain. We see a heavy object fall on someone's foot. We see him turn pale, grimace, cry out, clutch his foot, jump up and down so on and so forth. He is obviously feeling pain. But one can very well ask the question - what is it to feel pain? For the logical Behaviourists it is just to behave in these ways under these circum-

stances or at least to be disposed so to behave.

This way of analysing pain by the Analytical Behaviourists invites many questions. One may immediately ask the question - Does not such an analysis leave out just the essential feature, the sharp, highly unpleasant sensation so forcibly there in the forefront of consciousness and so agonizingly distressful? Surely it is the inner sensation which is the immediate cause of the outward behaviour of grimacing, crying out and limping about. That inner cause is left out in the third person account (i.e. in Logical Behaviourism).

Particular behaviour or dispositions to behave are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for sensations. Not necessary because one can imagine a pain so paralyzingly great or so trivially slight that there is no disposition to behave. And not sufficient because one can imagine such dispositions arising from other causes such as the desire to call attention to oneself, to deceive others or to immitate a person in pain. And one can imagine even that suddenly and unaccountably one might be overcome by a desire to grimace, cry out, and limp about for no reason at all. Such an occurrence is very puzzling, we might not know what to make of it, but surely it might occur. Others might be taken in and believe that he is feeling pain. But only he will know that he is not feeling pain. Therefore, feeling pain is one thing and being disposed to behave in certain ways is another. The feeling may produce the disposition to behave but we cannot say that they are iden-

tical nor even that the one is a necessary or sufficient condition for the other.

It is, therefore, a mistake to try and attempt to analyse all mental predicates behaviouristically. Ryle is mistaken when he thinks that it is necessary to deny not only that there can be Mental Substances but also that there can be mental event or occurrence. There is a distinction between mental occurrence and mental disposition. Jealousy, hatred, hunger, love and so on are mental dispositions because whenever these predicates are applied to a person it implies that he/she is disposed to behave in certain ways. For example, 'x is jealous of y' means 'x is disposed to show certain types of behaviour towards y'. Again there are such things as mental occurrences, for example, concepts like dreaming, imagining, thinking, etc. are mental occurrences and can not be exhaustively understood in terms of behaviour or physical expressions, however complicated the attempted reduction of the one to the other might be. They are occurrences and physical expressions are immaterial to their meanings. One may indulge in thinking without showing any outward sign for it. Therefore, thinking or 'thought' also qualify as mental events. We report such events when we say - "As I walked in a terrible thought occurred to me", "At midnight the thought crossed my mind", "It suddenly came to me", "Just then it dawned on me that ....."<sup>5</sup>

Thoughts of this sort come into one's head and go through one's mind. Whenever we report the occurrence of a thought in one of these many ways, we are reporting the occurrence of an event which took place at a particular time. As in the case of reports of feelings, reports of thoughts are not translatable into reports of behaviour or tendencies towards behaviour. So far as their meaning is concerned, they are reports of genuine occurrences but not overt performances. Therefore, Ryle has to exclude these mental occurrences from his theory and cannot explain them by expounding a dispositional analysis.

But take even cases where a Rylean account might seem at least initially plausible, e.g. the emotion, say, vanity. According to Ryle, to say that person is vain means he is disposed 'to talk a lot' about himself, 'to cleave to the society of the eminent, to reject the criticisms, to seek the footlights and to disengage himself from conversation about the merits of others.<sup>6</sup> If according to Ryle, vain person means he is disposed to behave in certain ways under certain circumstances then immediately the question arises -What does it mean 'to talk a lot' to reject criticism, etc? Does not it imply that some mental processes are going - on in himself ? Or will there not be occasions when the vain person finds his thought peculiarly centered on himself, on his prospect of success or his

appearance and so forth ? From this it proves that the feelings or emotions cannot be described except in terms of the situation and thoughts which occasion them. Because our thought and emotion are more sustained and more interwoven, the vain man can hardly be vain without some explicit thought about himself accompanied by emotions, sometimes more and sometimes less arresting in themselves. The emotion and the thought do not vie with one another nor do either of these have to be suspended for us to act appropriately.

Another point we can put against Ryle when he tries to explain 'love' or 'hate' in terms of dispositional senses. For him 'x hates y' means 'x is disposed to show certain types of behaviour towards y'. This type of analyses of mental predicates is wrong, because we can not act from the motive of love or hate in the dispositional senses, unless we have also experiences of loving and hating. And therefore, these cannot be reduced solely to behaving in certain ways towards others.

Logical behaviourists, particularly Ryle is guilty of arguing in a circular way by presenting his dispositional analysis of Mind. When we apply any mental predicates to a person by saying that 'x is intelligent', this statement, according to Ryle simply means 'x is

disposed to behave in a particular way'. That is to say that x is quick in answering, fast in understanding, the questions so on and so forth. But our problem is not yet solved. By giving the dispositional analysis of the concept of mind, we cannot get the meaning of the word 'Intelligent'. Rather it presupposes that we already know that this sorts of behaviour are regarded as intelligent behaviour. Ryle, if he wants to say that 'x is intelligent' then he must justify it by giving other instances which does not come under this description that 'he is behaving intelligently' or 'he is disposed to show certain kinds of behaviour.' Otherwise it, would be just the saying that 'he is behaving intelligently and therefore 'he is intelligent' which is not a case of proving that 'somebody is intelligent' but simply begging the questions. Therefore, Ryle's logical Behaviourism, i.e. his dispositional account of mind involves the fallacy of begging the question. This charge can also be brought against the analysis of all dispositional mental conduct concepts.

Perhaps the central difficulty of the behaviourist position can be put in the following ways. If the behaviourist contention that the mind is reducible to behaviour is to be taken seriously then it must, in Logic,

be the case that for every mental statement there will be a behaviour statement or a set of behaviour statements which will be strictly equivalent to it. In other word, every mental state - statement must entail a bodily statement (s) about behaviour which in their turn must entail the mental state statement in question. It is notorious that nobody has ever been able to produce such equivalence in practice. In the absence of this the behaviourist claim must loose most of its most of its bite. But perhaps it will be instructive to go into the question of why it is that the behaviourist programme of finding equivalences has failed. It could well be that the reason why the programme has failed is that it is logically impossible that it should succeed.

## REFERENCES

1. Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind, P. 50.
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6. Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind, P.83.

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