

PHI 1500: Major Issues in Philosophy

Session 15

October 28th, 2015



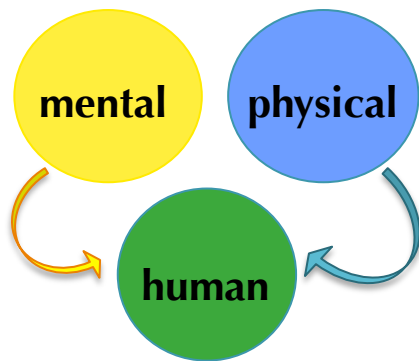
Philosophy of Mind: Ryle

Let's recap the major division between solutions to the mind-body problem

– *the problem of how to specify the relationship between mind & body,*

...introduced last class by Barbara Montero.

» “The primary divide among philosophers working on the mind-body problem is between

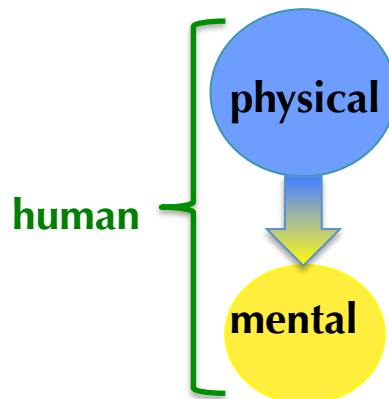


dualists, or more generally, nonphysicalists,

- who think that the mind *is* an ingredient additional to all the physical ingredients in a person,
 - i.e., the mind is distinct from, and not dependent upon, all the physical parts of a human.

➤ Descartes defended **substance dualism**:

- the view that minds & bodies are made out of different kinds of stuff.



and **physicalists**

- who think that [the mind] is *not* an extra ingredient above and beyond physical materials.
 - i.e., the mind emerges from the the organization & activity of all the physical parts of a human. ₂

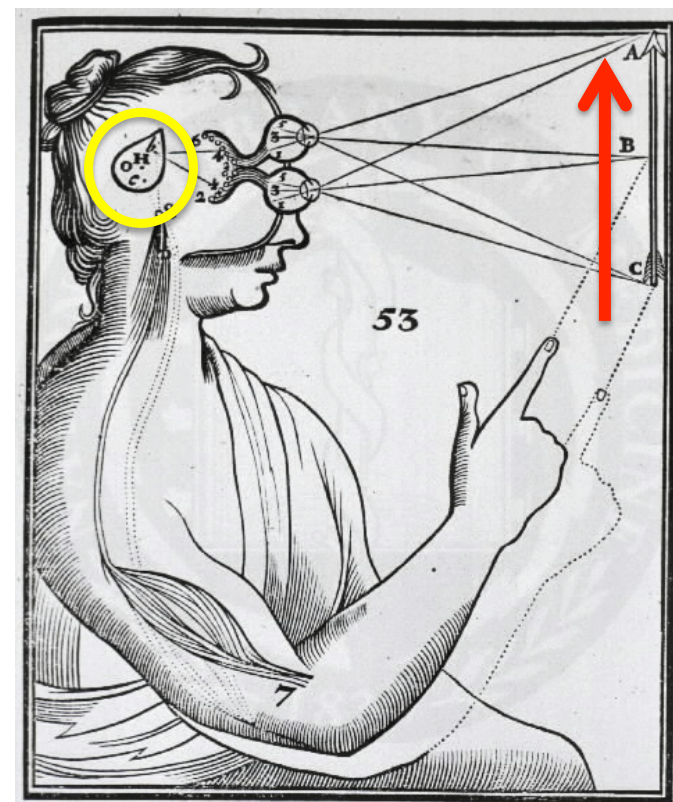
➤ Recall that Descartes substance dualism is also a type of *interactive dualism*:

“A prominent objection to interactive dualism is that *it is unclear how anything nonphysical could interact with anything physical.*”

- If minds & bodies are different substances, and minds aren't even made of matter, how can they cause things to happen in the physical world?

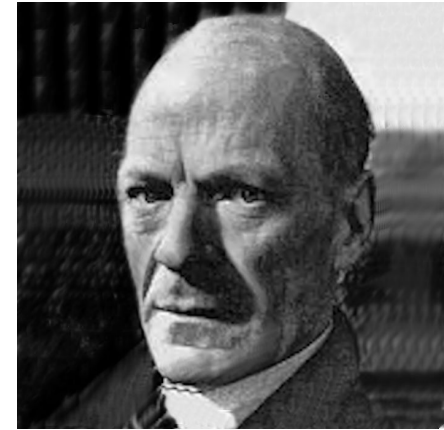
Descartes' response to the objection is that *the interaction takes place in the pineal gland,*

- ...but he still fails to explain *how* mental events are able to cause bodily motion,
- or how events in the body/brain cause mental effects.



Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976) wrote a scathing critique of Cartesian dualism and its influence on philosophy of mind.

- He describes Descartes' view as **"the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine,"** (4)
 - because Descartes characterizes minds as immaterial, ghostlike things, that somehow control the movements of a material body
- Ryle thinks substance dualism creates many more problems than it solves.
 - He objects that substance dualism makes minds other than our own seem as incomprehensible as ghosts or spirits,
 - which conflicts with the insight into others' minds that we take for granted in our everyday encounters.
- He believes a **physicalist** answer to the mind-body problem not only avoids the interaction problem,
 - but also does a better job of accounting for the everyday experiences we have with minds & bodies.



Ryle calls Cartesian dualism *'the official doctrine'*,

- to capture how *pervasive* belief in Cartesian dualism had become.

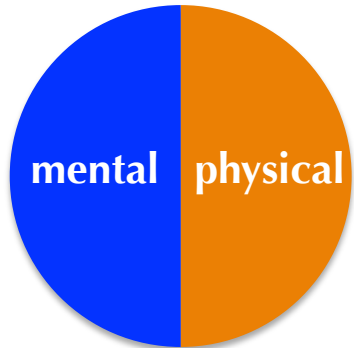
➤ According to *'the official doctrine'*,

- “every human being has **both body and a mind**”
 - » These are “ordinarily harnessed together,” but the mind can continue to exist apart from the body.
- “Human **bodies are in space**
 - » and are subject to the mechanical laws which govern all other bodies in space”
- “...But **minds are not in space**,
 - » nor are their operations subject to mechanical laws”
- “**Bodily** processes and states can be inspected by **external** observers”;
 - » i.e. they are **public**,
- ...but “The workings of one **mind** are not witnessable by other observers;
 - » its career is **private**” and **internal** (1)



According to Ryle,

- the ***trouble with dualism*** is that *it encourages us to think of mental & physical events as polar opposites.*
 - “It is assumed that there are two different kinds of existence or status”:
 - ***either mental or physical*** “...[like] the faces of coins are either heads or tails” (2)
 - This assumption follows the logical **law of the excluded middle**,
 - » which says that **two categories are mutually exclusive** (*nothing belongs to both categories*),
 - » and **jointly exhaust the possibilities** for what something could be (*nothing can belong to neither one of these categories*)
 - In this case, we assume that something can only be either mental or physical, but ***not both***, and ***not neither***.
- Dividing everything that exists into either mental or physical sets up a strict dichotomy, a.k.a. “a *polar opposition* between mind & matter” (2)
 - Ryle will provide reasons to believe that **the difference between minds & bodies is *not as extreme* as the ‘official doctrine’ of substance dualism says:**
 - minds & bodies have more in common than we usually acknowledge.



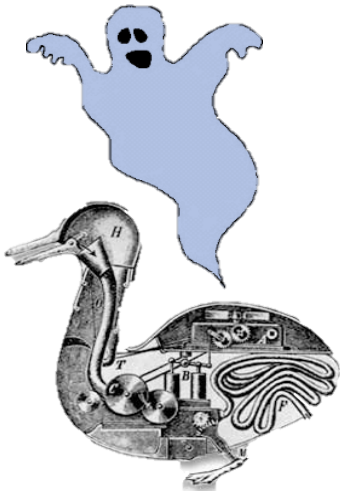
Ryle argues that **substance dualism's sharp division between bodies & minds implies that**

- **“A person therefore lives through two collateral histories,**
 - one consisting of what happens in and to his body,”
 - (Public, external, in the physical world)
 - “the other consisting of what happens in & to his mind.” (1)
 - (Private, internal, in the mental world)



Nevertheless, we think that minds & bodies can interact with one another,

- and “the *problem how a person's mind & body influence one another*”
 - » *i.e., the interaction problem,*
 - “...is notoriously charged with theoretical difficulties.”



- “What the mind wills, the legs, arms and tongue execute;
- what affects the ear and eye has something to do with what the mind perceives;
 - ...But the actual **transactions between the episodes of the private history and those of the public history remain mysterious,**
 - since by definition they can belong to neither series.” (1)

Ryle thinks that **when we exclude minds from the physical world,**

- and think of them as being entirely immaterial,
 - *we make minds entirely mysterious and unknowable.*
- **“Material objects are situated in a common field, known as ‘space’,”**
 - and these objects can causally interact with one another (e.g., by colliding)
 - **...“But mental happenings occur in insulated fields, known as ‘minds’,**
 - » and there is, apart maybe from telepathy, no direct causal connection between what happens in one mind and what happens in another.” (2)

- “People can see, hear and jolt one another's bodies,
- but [we] are *irremediably blind and deaf to the workings of one another's minds and inoperative upon them.*” (2)

Hey, what are you thinking about?



➤ Ryle is raising the *problem of other minds*:

- *How can we justify our common-sense belief that other people have minds just like ours,*
- *when we have no direct experience of (and hence no ideas or knowledge about) their mental lives?*

Ryle thinks **Cartesian dualism exacerbates** [heightens, amplifies] **the problem of other minds,**

- because it allows that we have:
 - *perfect knowledge of our own minds,*
 - through conscious *introspection*, or ‘self-observation’
 - “This self-observation is also commonly supposed to be immune from illusion, confusion or doubt.” (3)
 - *but no knowledge of the workings of other minds.*



» “...one person has no direct access of any sort to the events of the inner life of another.

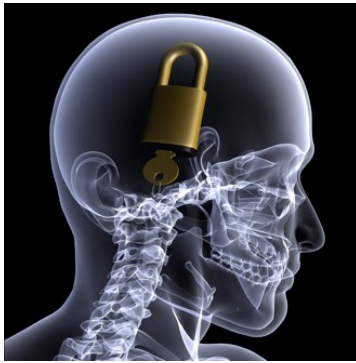
- » He cannot do better than make *problematic inferences*
- *from the observed behavior* of the other person’s body
 - *to the states of mind* which, by analogy from his own conduct, he supposes to be signaled by that behavior.” (3)

Hence, “an adherent of the official theory finds it difficult to resist this consequence of his premises[:]

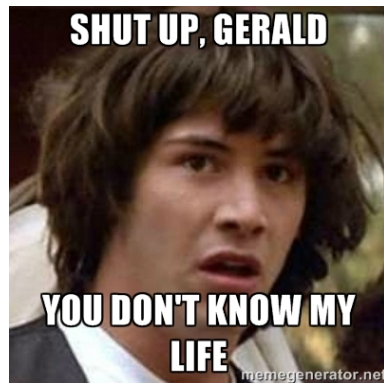
- that he has **no good reason to believe that there do exist minds other than his own.**” (3)



So, according to Cartesian dualism,



- “When [people are] described as
 - *knowing, believing* or *guessing* something, as *hoping, dreading, intending* or *shirking* something, as *designing* this or *being amused* at that [etc.],
- these verbs are...required to be construed as signifying *special episodes in their secret histories*” (3)



- In other words, each of us has **first-person authority** about the facts of their own mental life, due to our *privileged access* to the happenings of our own minds,
 - ...but *no reason at all to believe that other people have minds remotely like ours.*

» **For all we know, everyone except ourselves could be robots with no minds whatsoever,**

- just like the non-conscious Synths in *Humans*.



- Philosopher David Chalmers came up with the term '*philosophical zombie*' to describe hypothetical beings who look like humans, but don't have consciousness.



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- Ryle's claim is that **Cartesian dualism gives us a concept of the mind which makes it possible that everyone but us is just a philosophical zombie.**

Ryle argues that:

- if (as Descartes suggests) others' minds are *unknowable*, and bodies are just like machines,
- Then we “could never tell the difference between a man and a robot” (or a philosophical zombie) –
 - because the *only difference* between a person and a robot/zombie would be that *a person has a mind*;
 - but since we *can't ever know* that other people have minds like ours,
 - we *wouldn't be able to tell the difference!*



- Ryle is using a type of argument called a ***reductio ad absurdum*** here:
 - He tries to show that *his opponent's view must be rejected*,
 - *because it leads to an absurd conclusion we wouldn't want to accept.*
- ***Since Descartes' view leads to an absurd conclusion,***
 - (that we really have no idea who's a person, and who's a robot/zombie)
- **...Ryle thinks we have good reason to reject Cartesian dualism and embrace physicalism instead.**

Despite what the official doctrine says,

- people seem to be quite attuned to what's going on in other people's minds.
 - Our “mental-conduct concepts,” (like emotions, beliefs, desires, intentions, thoughts, etc.) are “regularly & effectively used” (4)



» In other words, (most) people are very skilled at **social cognition**.

- We develop the ability to grasp what others are thinking, feeling, etc. – and how those differ from our own mental states – as early as 4 years of age
 - **video:** bit.ly/1qotHpp

- The ‘official doctrine’ has no good explanation of how our insight into other minds is possible.
 - Ryle wants to “rectify the logic of mental-conduct concepts”,
 - i.e., explain how it makes any sense for us to talk about what other people think, feel, believe, perceive, etc.,
 - » as if we really know what’s going on in their minds.
 - ...so he will present a view called **behaviorism**,
 - which can make sense of our social cognition skills.



Ryle thinks we can easily explain our ability to understand other peoples' minds, if we declare that

- ***everything we want to know about other's minds can be discovered by observing their behaviors.***
- E.g., I understand that you *believe* that class begins at 10:45pm,
 - because I observe that (most of) you behave in such a way as to get to class by that time.
- I understand that someone is *sad*
 - if I observe their facial expressions, and/or see them crying.
- I understand when someone has the *intention* to share an idea with the class,
 - because I can tell from their body language, eye contact, etc.



➤ **Behaviorism** is the view that *mental states* (like thoughts, beliefs, emotions, intentions) are just a special type of behaviors that distinguish humans & animals from things that don't have minds (robots, inanimate objects, philosophical zombies...)

Ryle declares that

- **the Cartesian “dogma of the Ghost in the Machine...is *entirely false*,**
- and false not in detail but *in principle*.
 - ...It is one big mistake
 - and a mistake of a special kind[:]
 - ...a **category-mistake**.
 - “It represents the facts of mental life as if they belonged to one logical type or category (or range of types or categories),
 - when they actually belong to another.” (4)



An **example** of a **category mistake**:

- “A foreigner visiting Oxford or Cambridge for the first time is shown a number of colleges, libraries, playing fields, museums, scientific departments and administrative offices.
- He then asks, 'But where is the University?'
- I have seen where the members of the Colleges live, where the Registrar works, where the scientists experiment and the rest.
- But I have not yet seen the University in which reside and work the members of your University.'
 - It has then to be explained to him that the University is not another collateral institution, some ulterior counterpart to the colleges, laboratories and offices which he has seen.
 - The University is just the way in which all that he has already seen is organized.
 - When they are seen and when their co-ordination is understood, the University has been seen.” (4)



The foreigner’s **category mistake** was to think that “the University” is a member of the *same category* as the components of the school,

➤ and thus that it could be *contrasted* with its colleges, libraries, etc.

Another example of a category mistake:

- “A foreigner watching his first game of cricket learns what are the functions of the bowlers, the batsmen, the fielders, the umpires and the scorers.
 - He then says, “But there is no one left on the field to contribute the famous element of team-spirit.
 - I see who does the bowling, the batting, and the wicketkeeping;
 - but I do not see whose role it is to exercise *esprit de corps*.



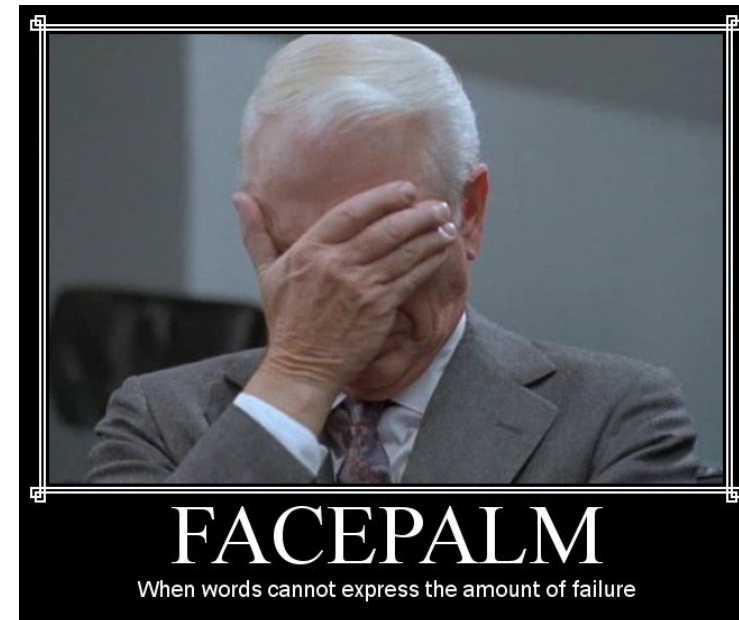
- » Once more, it would have to be explained that he was looking for the wrong type of thing.
- » Team-spirit is not another cricketing-operation supplementary to all of the other special tasks.
- » It is, roughly, the keenness with which each of the special tasks is performed, and performing a task keenly is not performing two tasks.” (4)

This foreigner’s **category mistake** was to think that team spirit is a member of the *same category* as bowling, batting, etc.,

- and thus that it could be *contrasted* with each of those activities.

All category mistakes involve the **misapplication of a concept**.

- Importantly, this can happen even when someone is able to use the concept effectively in other contexts.
 - E.g., “John Doe may be a relative, a friend, an enemy or a stranger to Richard Roe;
 - but he cannot be any of these things to the *Average Taxpayer*.
 - He knows how to talk sense in certain sorts of discussions about the *Average Taxpayer*,
 - but he is baffled to say why he could not come across him in the street as he can come across Richard Roe.
 - ...so long as John Doe continues to think of the *Average Taxpayer* as a fellow-citizen,
 - he will tend to think of him as an elusive insubstantial man,
 - a ghost who is everywhere yet nowhere.” (4-5)



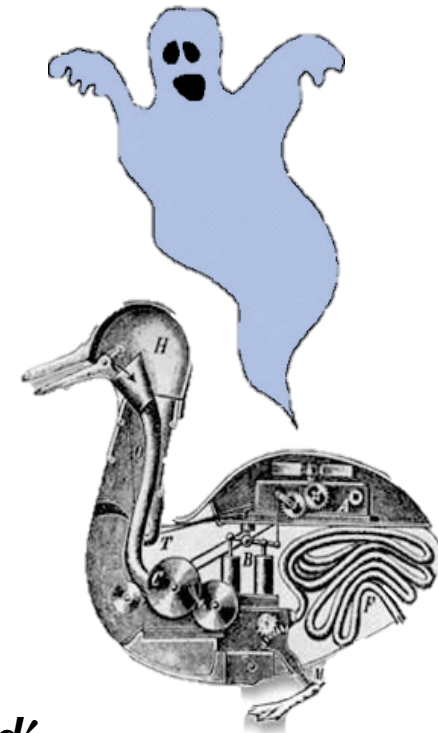
According to Ryle,

- Descartes began his theorizing from an assumption that “the mental could *not* be just a variety of the mechanical” events that occur in physical space (6)
 - So when he sought to explain the nature of the mind,
 - his instinct was to describe it as the *opposite* of anything physical, spatial, mechanical, etc.



Descartes' category mistake was to think that

- *minds are a member of the same category as bodies:*
 - that **minds & bodies are each 'types of existence'**,
 - but with different properties, and governed by different laws.
- **...and thus minds & bodies can be contrasted each other as *two different substances*.**



Ryle thinks that **Descartes has misapplied the concept of 'mind'**,

– by treating it as the polar opposite of 'body'.

- On Ryle's view, **minds & bodies are *not* suited to be contrasted.**

Ryle explains:

- “It is perfectly proper to say, in one logical tone of voice, that ***there exist minds***,
- and to say, in another logical tone of voice, that ***there exist bodies***.



- **But these expressions do *not* indicate two different species of existence,**
- *...[Rather,] they indicate two different senses of 'exist'” (9)*

» When we say ‘bodies exist’,

- *we mean that bodies are physical objects extended in space,*

» But when we say ‘minds exist’,

- *we mean that there is a special feature of human beings which differentiates them from robots & inanimate objects.*

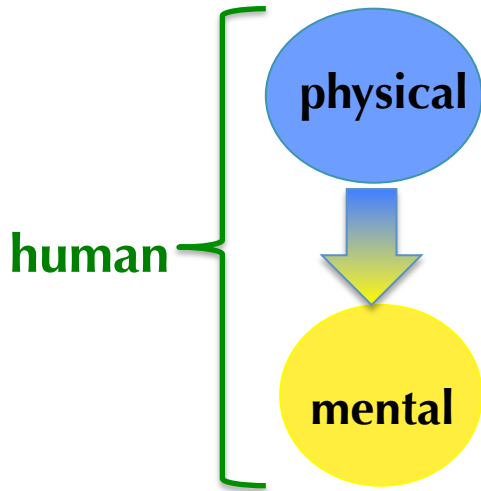
➤ **So minds & bodies *aren't really* two different types of existence.**

➤ *They both are components of the physical world.*

- They are not members of the same category,
- and thus they cannot really be contrasted like ‘black & white’ can.

Behaviorism is a type of **physicalism**,

- because it says that **minds** are:



– *not* a distinct type of substance,

– nor a separate ingredient from all the physical parts of human beings,

- » but rather **just a useful way of describing a special group of behaviors** that make us different from robots (etc.),
- » but are nevertheless *very much part of our physical existence*.

On Ryle's behaviorist version of physicalism,

- **minds emerge from the physical world *because we decide to designate some physical phenomena as 'mental'*.**

In contrast, other versions of physicalism,

- (like Patricia Churchland's view, covered next week)
- say minds literally emerge from physical processes, typically the functioning of brains.