UNIT 14: RYLE'S DISPOSITIONAL THEORY OF MIND

UNIT STRUCTURE

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14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explain some of the important contributions of Gilbert Ryle to the philosophy of mind
- describe the traditional theories of mind.
- explain the behaviouristic theory of mind.
- understand the meaning of category mistake.
- compare between Descartes Dualism and Dispositional theory of mind by Gilbert Ryle.
- analyse Ryle's criticism on Descartes' Dualism.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976) was a British philosopher. He was a pioneer of ordinary language philosophy. He is principally known for his critique of Cartesian dualism for which he coined the phrase the ghost in the machine. Ryle's book "The Concept of Mind" (1949) is an illustration for the critique of Cartesian dualism.

In the 'Concept of Mind' Ryle admits the idea of mind as an independent entity. He attacks the idea of 17th and 18th century thinkers (such as Descartes) that human nature is smaller machine with a ghost in it to account for intelligence, spontaneity and other such human realities. Ryle asserted that the working of the mind arenot distinct from the actions of the body. They are one and the same. Mental vocabulary is merely a different manner of describing action. He also claimed that the nature of personal motives are defined by that person's dispositions to act in certain situations. There are no overt feelings, pains, or twinges of vanity.

Philosophy of mind is a philosophical study of mind. Here an attempt is made to analyse and examine those concepts that involve mind including the very concept of mind itself. The philosophy of mind includes different mental states within its subject matter which can roughly be classified under the following headings:

i. **Sensations :** Pains, aches, tickles, itches, throbs, tingles etc.

ii. **Cognitions:** Believing, knowing, under standing conceiving thinking reasoning etc.

iii. **Emotions:** Fear, jealousy, envy, anger, grief, indignation, enjoyment etc.

iv. **Perceptions:** Seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching etc.

v. **Quasi Perceptual:** Dreaming,imagining, seeing in the mind's eye, hallucinating, seeing after images etc.

vi. **Conative States:** Acting, trying, wanting, intending, wishing etc.

Thus the philosophy of mind has different mental phenomena. **The most important problem of the philosophy of mind is the problem concerning the relation between mental and physical properties. They are called 'The mind body problem'. It is the central problem of philosophy of mind. The mind-body dualism is formulated by**

Descartes over 300 years ago. Descartes argues that the mind or soul is separated from his body. A view like this is called 'Substance dualism. According to this theory, a composite being is made up of two distinct substances, an immaterial mind and a material body.

14.3 DIFFERENT THEORIES OF MIND

Several theories have been advanced to describe the nature of the relation between mind and body. As a result **we have different theories of mind such as interactionism, Occasionalism, pre-established harmony, parallelism, epiphenomenalism, etc. Moreover different philosophers offer different theories of mind under the headings of Dualism, Mentalistic Monism, Neutral Monism etc.** We have also some principal theories of mind during the nineteenth century. We can distinguish these theories under four classes such as materialistic theories, Idealistic theories, Double aspect theories etc.

The materialistic theories of mind admits that there is no other reality than matter. Mind is either a form or function of matter. Greek philosopher Democritus admits the materiastic theory of the mind. Democritus considers the soul to be composed of atoms like the body.

Epiphenomenalism is a theory of mind advocated by a group of materialists. This word was first used by Huxley. It indicates that mind is not a factor in natural processes. Mind is an epiphenomenon i.e. of phenomenon of secondary importance only. Mind is a kind of functionless attendent upon certain forms of cerebral activity a sort of shadow thrown by the body.

In Russia, Pavlov admitted the old mechanistic theory under the title of behaviorism. Ryle, in his book, 'The Concept of Mind' has accepted (with minor reservations) a thorough going behavioristic standpoint and tried to discard the theological notion of mind or soul temporarily lodged in the neurological machine. Behaviorism continues the mechanistic trend in psychology, reducing psychic phenomena to the relations of the organism.

14.4 DESCARTES' THEORY OF MIND

Descartes' theory of mind is known as dualism. It was also accepted by Locke and popularized in America through the influence of the Scottish school. According to this theory, mind and body are quite distinct and represent the two universal realities. At the close of nineteenth century William James in America and most of the leading psychologists in Britain such as Ward, stout, MC Dougall and their disciples clung to this dualistic theory of mind. **Descartes advocated the theory of interaction between mind and body. Mind and body are two separate and independent substances created by God. Descartes maintained that these two substances interact and there is a causal relation between the two. Mind which is a spiritual substance has a definite location in the pineal gland of the brain. It exerts influence upon the body and is affected by the brain process**. According to interactionism,bodily processes are at times supposed to cause mental experiences and at other times are caused by them. Thus according to Descartes, consciousness and extension or mind and body are independent of one another and do not involve each others existence. As such there are two independent substances called mind and body.

Descartes doctrine of man is equally dualistic. He contended that a soulless and lifeless bodily mechanism combined in man with rational soul.

To avoid the difficulties of the theory of interaction, the followers of Descartes advocate the theory of occasionalism. The two philosophers who advocate the theory are Arnold Geulinex and Nicolas de Malbranche. According to occasionalism, the correpondence between mind and body is bought about God. On the occasion of certain changes in mind and body God intervenes to bring about corresponding changes in the other. But this explanation isnot at all convincing.

William MC Dugalls has received the use of the word Animism as a name for his philosophy of mind which is nothing other than the usual soul theory.

Thus Descartes and his successors have falsely created the dualistic theory of mind. The theory of interactionism as advocated by Descartes appears to be dogmatic. But the absolute dualism between mind and body must be avoided if we are to reach any solution of the problem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: State whether the following statements are true or false.

a) Gilbert Ryle was a pioneer of ordinary language philosophy.

b) Descartes' advocates the Dualistic theory of mind.

c) Gilbert Ryle accepted Descartes' dualisfic theory of mind.

Q 2: Fill in the blanks

a) Ryles' famous book _____ is an illustration for the critique of Cartesian dualism.

b) Ryle advocates the theory of _____.

c) According to Descartes, mind and body interact upon each other on the _____ gland of the mind.

Q 3: What is epiphenomenalism?

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Q 4: What is interactionism?

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Q 5: Who are the advocates of the theory of occasionalism?

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14.5 GILBERT RYLE'S CRITICISM OF CARTESIAN DUALISM

In his famous book 'The Concept of Mind, Ryle has used the most appropriate method of linguistic analysis to show the hollowness of mind

body dualism. Ryle alleges that Descartes initiated the philosophers myth of mind body dualism. Descartes had established the dualism of mind and body as two distinct substances having two opposite qualities. For example, Human bodies are in space and are subject to mechanical laws. Bodily states and processes being public can be observed by others. But minds arenot in space, nor are their operations subject to mechanical laws. The workings of mind are not witnessable by other observers. Its carrier is the privileged operation of the individual himself. One cannot know what is going on other's minds. One can only directly recognize of the states and processes of his own mind. This one's mental states and processes are wholly and directly perceivable by him who possesses them. Descartes assumes that there is a basic distinction between mind and matter. But Ryle says that this assumption is a 'category mistake' because it attempts to analyse the relation between- as if they were terms of the same logical 'category.'

According to Ryle, Descartes' dualistic theory is an attempt to analyse mental processes as if the mind were distinct from the body. He explains that knowing how to perform an act skillfully is not a matter of purely theoretical reasoning. Knowing how to perform an act skillfully is a matter of being able to think logically and practically, and is a matter of being able to put practical reasoning into action. According to Ryle, mental processes are nothing but intelligent acts. There are no mental processes which are distinct from intelligent acts. Thus an act of remembering, dreaming, knowing or witting is not merely a clue to some hidden mental process. It is how the mental process or intellectual operation is defined. Ryle argues that there is no ghostly invisible entity called the 'mind' inside a mechanical apparatus called the 'body'. The working of the mind isnot an independent mechanism which governs the workings of the body. The workings of the mind arenot distinct from the actions of the body, but are conceptualized as way of explaining the actions of the body. In Ryle's own language a person lives through two collateral histories, one consisting of what the other consisting of what happens in and to his mind. The first is public, the second is private. The

events in the first history are events in the physical world; those in the second are events in the mental world." (Ryle G. The Concept of Mind, p. 13).

14.6 THE MEANING OF 'CATEGORY MISTAKE'

Ryle abuses the Cartesian dualism as an absurd doctrine which involves 'The dogma of the Ghost 'in the Machine'. Ryle says, "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". (Ibid, p. 17). Ryle finds that in the dualism of Descartes there is a capital mistake which is termed as 'category mistake' is explained by Ryle with the following illustrations.

(a) If a foreigner visiting the University of 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 the question, 'But where is the university? His question is a big category mistake because he misconstrues the university to be a parallel institution like the library or the museum. He does not realize that the university is the way all these institutions function and that it has no seperate collateral existence of its own.

(b) A child witnessing the march past of a division commits same category mistake in expecting to see the 'division' apart from seeing the passing of various battalions, batteries, squadrons etc. His question 'When is the division to arrive' is a big mistake arising out of type confusion in language.

(c) A similar category mistake committed by a foreigner witnessing for the first time a cricket match. On showing the functions of various batsmen, fielders, bowlers and umpires, the foreigner wants to know as to 'who will contribute to the team spirit'?

In each of these cases a question of the wrong logical type has been asked. Hence all of these have committed a category mistake. Ryle indicates that the sentence factors belonging to one type cannot belong

to another i.e. one form of expression that can be filled in logically in one form of fact cannot be filled in another without involving a logical absurdity. For Ryle the mind is a disposition or a complex of dispositions belonging to various kinds of observable behaviour. The mind is the way of the various mental epithets function, just as the British constitution is the way the British Home Office and the church of England function.

Ryle makes it clear that mind and body both exist but they don't exist in the same sense. The Cartesian dualism took them as existing in the same sense. According to it, mind and body were both substance existing together in human body, having their own proper fields of action. Ryle is against the type of dualism, and advocates that such a co-existing substance as mind has no reality at all. Such a mind he calls a ghost and he is totally against the conception of a ghost in the body machine. This mind is a myth. Through out his book he has tried to explode this myth. But by exploding the myth, he is not negating the concept of mind. Ryle has his own theory of mind. What he is negating are the idioms in which mind was conceived and described by the dualists.

14.7 THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN 'KNOWING HOW' AND 'KNOWING THAT'

Ryle distinguishes between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that' i. e. knowing how to type write and knowing that the Indian type writer is cheaper than others. Ryle says that knowing in the sense of 'knowing how' is a disposition. Knowing is the ability to do certain acts or things. Such ability is called disposition. There is nothing categorical about dispositions. Dispositional statements are always hypothetical statements. They always involve 'if then'. That is why they resemble how statements. Thus Ryle says that 'knowing' in the sense of knowing how is necessarily a disposition to act outwardly. Knowing how to drive a car means to know that there are rules of driving and to be able to drive the car.

Thus Ryle's philosophy of mind is anti-cartesian and anti-dualistic. It leaves no room for internal privacy in the life of an individual.



CHECK YOUR PROGESS

Q 6: What is the meaning of category mistake?

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Q7: What is 'mind' according to Ryle?

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Q8: What is dispositional theory of mind?

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Q 9: What does behaviourism admit?

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Q10: Fill in the blanks

a) Knowing in the sense of _____ is a disposition.

b) _____ is the ability to do certain acts or things.

c) Dispositional statements are always _____ statements.

d) Ryles' theory of mind is _____ and _____.

e) Ryles' behaviourism is known as _____.

Q 11: Who for the first time initiated the philosophers' myth of mind-body realism?

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Q 12: Write the name of the doctrine out of which 'the dogma of the Ghost' involved.

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Q 13: Name the philosopher who distinguishes between 'Knowing how' and 'Knowing that'

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14.8 LET US SUM UP

- Ryle's chief aim is to refute the myth of the "dogma of the ghost in the machine" and to rectify the notions about the nature of mind. The main aim of Ryle is to show the falsity of the Cartesian dualistic theory of mind and to reallocate the facts of mental life.
- Ryle gives the dispositional account of mind. According to him, the mind is only a disposition to behave in certain ways. Ryle's study is not a laboratory study based on observation and experiment. In his philosophy of mind Ryle tries to establish that there is no private inner life at all and mind is just a name for typical human behaviours. According to him, all the statements referring to mind are reports about current bodily behaviour. Ryle acceptsbehaviourism as the theory of mind. It comes into existence on the rejection of the dualistic theory of mind.
- Behaviourism admits that there is only one substance i.e. the body and mind is nothing but the behaviour of the body. Ryle's behaviourism is known as philosophical or analytical or logical behaviourism. Philosophical behaviourism holds that meanings of the mind predicates must be explained in terms of overt behaviour or that statement about a person's mind can be completely analysed in terms of statements about what others people observe. By his philosophical behaviourism, Ryle tries to analyse all mental predicates in terms of dispositions.
- Ryle maintains that philosophical confusion arise through the assimilation or misapplication of categorically different terms and can only be cleared up by a careful analysis of the logic and use of language. Ryle admits that mental epithets are dispositional in character. Ryle rejects the methods of self knowledge i.e. self consciousness and introspection. Ryle doesnot admit that the mental terms describe an inner private mental world. He offers

the dispositional analysis of mind. Dispositions are nothing but an ability, propensity, liability or capacity to do certain type in certain circumstances.

- Ryle is certainly a linguistic philosopher' in the sense that he uses logic and facts about language to solve philosophical problems. Ryle denies the traditionalists' account of mind to be a substance over and above the body. Mind is thought to be a disposition, a set, a style, or an organic state of readiness, to do and undergo certain sorts of things in their appropriate situation.
- Ryle says that knowing in the sense of 'knowing how' is a disposition. Knowing is the ability or proneness to do certain acts or things. Such an ability or proneness is called a disposition. There is nothing categorical about dispositions. Dispositional statements involve 'if-then' model. Ryle shows that as motive, emotion is a disposition, as agitation, it is a liability condition and as feeling it is nothing more than bodily sensations. Ryle thinks that there is nothing other wordly or mysterious about sensations and observations. According to him sensations means bodily feeling. The theorists' account of sensation is not covered by the ordinary language and thus Ryle admits it as meaningless.
- From his criticism of Cartesian dualism we know Ryle's account of self knowledge. Where as the dualists had based self knowledge on cousciousness and introspection, Ryle bases it on induction. Where as the dualists had based the knowledge of other's mind or character on feeble inference, Ryle bases it again on induction. There is no question of pure ego or pure consciousness as opposed to body. Thus Ryle attempts to demolish the whole structure of Cartesian dualism and establish the behaviouristic theory of mind.