



An exposition on the mind-body dualism

Dr. Rajkumar Modak

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, West Bengal, India

Abstract

The philosophy of mind is generally concerned with the following two types of questions— epistemological and metaphysical. The epistemological questions are the questions about *what we can know* when it comes to the mind. These epistemological questions include questions about (a) how we can know about the mental states of others, (b) how we can know about our own mental states, and (c) the nature of these forms of knowledge. Metaphysical questions are concerned with the fundamental structure of the mind. The problem that has dominated the philosophy of mind over the last three centuries or so, and which will provide the basis of these notes, is a metaphysical one: the mind-body problem. This paper is an attempt to answer these questions.

Keywords: epistemological, metaphysical, mind-body problem

Introduction

The philosophy of mind is generally concerned with the following two types of questions— epistemological and metaphysical. The epistemological questions are the questions about *what we can know* when it comes to the mind. These epistemological questions include questions about (a) how we can know about the mental states of others, (b) how we can know about our own mental states, and (c) the nature of these forms of knowledge. Metaphysical questions are concerned with the fundamental structure of the mind. But the problem that has dominated the philosophy of mind over the last three centuries or so, and which will provide the basis of these notes, is a metaphysical one: the mind-body problem. This paper is an attempt to answer these questions.

To answer these questions; it seems to be that traditional philosophies of mind can be divided into two broad categories of theories: dualist theories and non-dualist theories. Both the approaches are based on the presupposition that (i) the whole universe is the formulation of two primitive stuff— consciousness being or mind and non-conscious being or matter and (ii) in non-dualist approach one of the primitive stuff (mind or matter) has been taken into consideration to explain the other. In the dualist approach, the mind is a non-physical, private substance but body is physical, public and acts according to the mechanical law. In materialist theories the mental is not distinct from the physical; indeed, all mental states, properties, processes and operations are in principle identical with physical states, properties, processes and operations. Idealist theories, on the other hand, say that the matter is not distinct from the psychical; all material objects are the reformulation of the idea of mind in some form and other.

On the basis of the above mentioned discussion we may rename these theories as follows:

- i) *Substance dualism*
- ii) *Reductive materialism*
- iii) *Non-reductive materialism.*

The first, *substance dualism*, says that the mind and the body really are distinct kinds of entity. The body is made up of a physical substance, whereas the mind is something more like a ghostly soul, and as such is made out of a kind of ghostly mental substance which is non-physical.

The second kind of response may be considered as reductive *materialism*. According to reductive materialists there is only one kind of substance in the world: the physical kind. When we talk about mental states and events, on this view, we're really talking about physical states, even if we don't always realize it.

A third option is a kind of compromise between the first two. Supporters of *non-reductive materialism* agree with reductive materialists that there is only physical substance in the world. They disagree with the reductive materialist, however, in the claim that the physical stuff is *all there is* to mental phenomena. Even if our mental states and events depend on, or are made up out of, our physical states, facts about our mental lives can't be reduced to facts about our physical make-up.

Substance Dualism is very much important here, because the other two theories directly or indirectly related with the first one or in other words we may say that the other theories are also another form of the first one.

A long tradition in philosophy has held, with René Descartes that the mind must be a non-bodily entity: a soul or mental substance. This thesis is called 'substance dualism' (or 'Cartesian dualism') because it says that there are two kinds of substance in the world, mental and physical or material.

In the second Meditation, mind, which making use of the liberty which pertains to it, takes for granted that all those things of whose existence it has the least doubt, are non-existent, recognizes that it is however absolutely impossible that it does not itself exist. This point is likewise of the greatest moment, inasmuch as by this means a distinction is easily drawn between the things which pertain to mind—that is to say to the intellectual nature—and those which pertain to

body^[1].

One reason for holding this belief is that the soul, unlike the body, is immortal. Another reason for believing it is that we have free will, and this seems to require that the mind is a non-physical thing, since all physical things are subject to the laws of nature. Although the nature of mind and body are totally different, Descartes thinks that these two polar can make influence to each other through the inter action which is known as 'inter action-ism' in philosophy.

Mind-body dualism, founded by René Descartes casts an important land mark not only on philosophy but also in science. The scientists hold that their subject matter must be comprised of the material objects, because these objects can only be taken into the consideration of scientific experiments. It seems to be followed that the philosopher has devoted their attention to analyze the methodological peculiarities of the physical sciences. The analysis has helped to clarify the nature of confirmation, the logical structure of scientific theories, the formal properties of statements that express laws and the question of whether theoretical entities actually exist.

Several challenges have been raised against Cartesian dualism, although the critics have been failed to provide an alternative theory except Gylbert Ryle. Some of these challenges are as follows:

According to Descartes mind and body are separate substances. If the body is only physical and material, how can a *non-physical* and *immaterial* mind possibly act on the body? More importantly, how can a 'mental' action or event in the mind be the cause of a physical action by the body?

When mind and body are viewed today as a dualism, the emphasis is on the mind, that is to say the information, being fundamentally different from the material brain. Since the universe is continuously creating new information, by rearranging existing matter, this is an important and understandable difference. Matter (and energy) is conserved, a constant of the universe. Information is not conserved; it is the source of genuine novelty.

What is surprising in this regard is that most of the scientists and as well as the philosophers considers these mind-body dualism as final unless the criticism raised by the Gylbert Ryle in his famous book, 'The Concept of Mind' on 1949. He has tried to reject mind body dualism on the basis of logic. To analyze Descartes he has remarked,

One of the chief intellectual origins of what I have yet to prove to be the Cartesian category-mistake seems to be this. When Galileo shower that his methods of scientific discovery where competent to provide a mechanical theory which should cover every occupant of space, Descartes found in himself two conflicting motives. As a man of scientific genius he could not but endorse the claims of mechanics, yet as a religious and man he could not accept, as Hobbes accepted, the discouraging rider to those claims, namely that human nature differs only in degree of complexity from clockwork. The mental could not be just a variety of the mechanical.

He and subsequent philosophers naturally but erroneously availed themselves of following escape-route. Since mental-conduct words are not to be construed as signifying the occurrence of mechanical processes, they must be construed as signifying the occurrence of non- mechanical processes; since mechanical laws explain movements in space as the

effects of other movements in space, other laws must explain some of the non-spatial working of minds as the effects of other non-spatial working of minds. The difference between the human behaviors which we describe as intelligent and those which we describe as unintelligent must be a difference in their causation; so, while some movements of human tongues and limbs are effects of mechanical causes, others must be the effects of non-mechanical causes, i.e. some issue from movements of particles of matter, other from working of mind^[2].

Gylbert Ryle recommends 'Cartesian Dualism' as a myth and the dogma in the ghost in the machine. He also rejects mind-body dualism as it commits 'category mistake'. If it is considered that Ryle has been successful to reject 'Cartesian Dualism' then the theories based on this dualism would be less important. Now it is natural to ask (i) how does the phenomenon concerned with so called mind be explained? (ii) which theory would be replaced as a substitution of either materialism or idealism regarding the universe? The philosophers are still engaged to find out the answer of the above mentioned questions.

References

1. Descartes, René: Meditations on First Philosophy 1641Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1996. This file is of the 1911edition of The Philosophical Works of Descartes (Cambridge University Press), translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane.
2. Ryle Gylbert. The Concept of Mind, Routledge, 1949, 9-10.