

1. Behaviorism

Philosophical behaviorism about the mental is a family of views. The spirit of behaviorism is that, in some sense, there is nothing more to mentality than behavior. **Analytical behaviorism** (a.k.a *logical behaviorism*) says that sentences about mentality can be translated without loss into sentences about observable behavior. This is a claim about the semantics, or meaning, of sentences about mentality. **Ontological behaviorism** says that mental states just are (dispositions to observable) behavior. This is an ontological thesis about mentality. Analytical and ontological behaviorism are logically independent of one another: neither entails the other.

A very different sort of view is **methodological behaviorism**, which says that psychological explanation ought to not refer to private or subjective inner mental states. This might well be true even if philosophical behaviorism is false. The motivation for methodological behaviorism is to ensure the public testability of hypotheses, which is required for objectivity and rational intersubjective agreement. This is how science proceeds.

2. Ryle's ghost

In his masterpiece *The Concept of Mind*, Gilbert Ryle had this to say about the “official doctrine about the nature and place of minds” in the world. The official doctrine is shared by philosophers, theologians and even many educated laypeople. The official doctrine has several parts. First, it is committed to substance dualism, as evidenced by the (supposed) fact that the “mind may continue to exist” ever “after the death of the body.” Second, bodies are spatial and subject to mechanical laws whereas minds are neither. Third, bodies can be “inspected by external observers,” and their histories are therefore “public affairs.” Fourth, each of us has “privileged access” to what goes on in our respective minds; we can tell by “introspection” what happens in our own mind, but our minds and their happenings are not publicly observable: “each of

us lives the life of a ghostly Robinson Crusoe.” Your mind is like a private theater where only you can witness what occurs. Fifth, and as a result, skeptical worries arise about the existence of other minds: we can’t 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 [our] own conduct, [we suppose] to be signalled by that behavior.”

In Ryle’s memorable phrase, on the Cartesian view, a mind is like *a ghost in a machine*. This is “Descartes’ myth.”

3. Wittgenstein's beetle

The supposed privacy of the mind also dissatisfied Ludwig Wittgenstein. He provides this memorable allegory of the beetle and the box:

If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word ‘pain’ means — must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalize the *one* case so irresponsibly?

Now someone tells me that *he* knows what pain is only from his own case! — Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a ‘beetle’. No one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle. — Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. — But suppose the word ‘beetle’ had a use in these people’s language? — If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*; for the box might even be empty. (§ 293)

4. Behaviorist arguments

Consider this epistemological argument against Cartesian dualism. Something like this is clearly at work in the above Ryle quote (and obliquely hinted at in the Wittgenstein quote). **Undetectable:**

1. If Cartesian dualism were true, then we couldn’t know that others have minds. (Premise)

2. But we can know that others have minds. (Premise)
3. So Cartesian dualism isn't true. (From 1 and 2)

Line 1 might be justified by appeal to the fact that there's no way to detect whether immaterial substance is "primitively united" with a physical body. Line 2 is just common sense: as Wittgenstein said, "Just try — in a real case — to doubt someone else's fear or pain" (§ 303). Doing so is, quite simply, absurd.

There is a closely related epistemological argument for behaviorism. **Detectable:**

1. The best explanation of how easily we know that other minds exist is that we perceive them. (Premise)
2. What we perceive is behavior. (Premise)
3. So other minds (probably) consist in behavior. (From 1 and 2)

Line 2 is just obvious, or so one might think. What justifies line 1? There is no easy answer. It is very natural, after all, to say of someone, "I can *see* that he's in pain," or, "Listen to that young girl — you can *hear* how frightened she is."

Wittgenstein's remarks are enigmatic and an endless source of interpretational dispute. But it seems that something like the following is a fair attempt at reconstructing one argument in the ballpark. **Public Pain:**

1. If 'pain' has a common public meaning, then pain is publicly observable. (Premise)
2. 'pain' has a common public meaning. (Premise)
3. So pain is publicly observable. (From 1 and 2)
4. What is publicly observable is behavior.¹ (Premise)
5. So pain is behavior. (From 3 and 4)

Of course, this doesn't yet establish behaviorism. But Wittgenstein says other things that suggest he had similar views about mentality more generally. For example, "When one says 'Still, an inner

¹ "What do psychologists record? — What do they observe? Isn't it the behavior of human beings, in particular their utterances?" (Part II.v)

process does take place here' — one wants to go on: 'After all, you *see* it.' . . . What we deny is that the picture of the inner process gives us the correct idea of the use of the word We say that this picture with its ramifications stands in the way of our seeing the use of the word as it is" (§ 305).

How would the generalized Wittgensteinian argument go? Here's one attempt: **Public Mentality:**

1. For every mental term 'M', if 'M' has a common public meaning, then M is publicly observable. (Premise)
2. Every mental term has a public meaning. (Premise)
3. So every M is publicly observable. (From 1 and 2)
4. What is publicly observable is behavior. (Premise)
5. So mentality is behavior. (From 3 and 4)

None of the behaviorist arguments we looked at establishes analytical behaviorism — none concludes that mental-talk translates seamlessly into behavior talk. And this might well be because behaviorists recognized that analytic behaviorism is, frankly, a non-starter. As Wittgenstein said, any "*simple* formula" relating the mental and behavioral will "go wrong" (Part II.V). (See Putnam's examples involving spartans, super-spartans, etc.)

5. The main problem for ontological behaviorism

The main problem for behaviorism is that there are some mental terms or states that don't seem even loosely tied to behavior, or such that you can observe them. For example, what does it look like when someone believes that there is no largest prime? Can you observe that I wish that physical space was Euclidean? Does consciousness lend itself to public scrutiny in some way?

Sources

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