Behaviorism

1. **Recap: The Cartesian Mind**

According to Ryle, the Cartesian mind has the following features:

a. *non-material*: the mind does not exist in space nor is it subject to physical laws.

b. *private*: it is not possible to have access to the mental states of other minds.

c. *transparent and immediately accessible*: if you are in a certain mental state, you are in a position to know it. We have unmediated access to the contents of our mind unlike our access to things in the external world, which is mediated by the senses.

d. *internal* (but not really internal).

e. *temporal* but non-spatial.

2. **Rylean Problems with Substance Dualism**

**The problem of other minds:**

All we have contact with are the bodies of other people. How can we ever know that other minds in the world exist or know what they are like? If we only have direct access to our own minds, how do we know that other people aren’t just robots in human form?

As Ryle claims: “Absolute solitude is on this showing the ineluctable destiny of the soul. Only our bodies can meet” (34).

**The problem of the acquisition of psychological language:**

On the Cartesian view, it remains a mystery how we could have even learned the meaning of psychological terms. After all, on the Cartesian picture, terms like ‘pain’, ‘belief’, ‘desire’ and so on refer to causes of certain sorts—causes to which the owner him/herself only has access. It is hard to see how psychological terms entered public language such as English given that psychological terms do not refer to states or events to which there is inter-subjective access.

3. **Rylean Diagnosis of their Origin**

Descartes was faced with **two conflicting views**:

i. The view that mechanical laws exist and apply to every physical object

ii. The view that human beings have free will and an immortal soul.

**His resolution**: posit another separate realm for the mind similar to the physical world but with non-physical laws and causes, objects and events—“the same only different”.
The legacy: we have fallen into the trap of assuming that our psychological language refers to events in and states of this Cartesian mind (or the Cartesian Ghost in the Machine).

Consider the sentence ‘Sally is in lots of pain’. When you utter this sentence, you must be referring to some inner (distinctly mental) state or event of Sally’s.

Or, ‘Jake believes that is going to snow today’. When I utter this sentence, I must be referring to some inner (distinctly mental) state of Jake’s.

But, according to Ryle, this is all a mistake. In fact, it is a mistake of a very special kind: a category mistake.

Category mistake: the mistake of assigning the wrong logical force to a term or expression.

Consider Ryle’s cricket example:

After each position is explained—the roles of the bowler, the batsman, the fielders, the umpires and the scorers—the question is asked: “But who contributes to the famous element of team spirit?” The questioner has mistaken a way of playing the game for a specific team position.

In this case, the mistake arises from an inability to use certain words and expressions in the English vocabulary. The questioner assigns the wrong logical force to the term ‘team spirit’.

This is not Ryle’s charge in the case of psychological terms. But he does think that our use of them involves a category mistake.

We know how to use the words ‘belief’, ‘pain’ and so on, but we take it that these terms refer to ‘inner’ mental episodes or states (i.e. the ‘private’ causes of our public bodily actions). But they do not.

4. Logical Behaviorism

Logical behaviorism: statements containing mental vocabulary can be analyzed into statements containing just the vocabulary of physical behavior.

Two kinds of behavior:

a. Physical behavior: an instance of physical behavior is a physical change to a creature’s body, such as the rising of the creature’s arm, or the emission of certain sounds. (Kim’s type i and ii)

b. Agential behavior: an instance of agential behavior is something a creature does, such as raising its arm or saying that it is time for lunch. (Kim’s type iii and iv)

We can also define physical behavioral dispositions and agential behavioral dispositions. Dispositions are properties like fragility, solubility, elasticity: something is fragile, for example, just in case it would break if struck or dropped. Important: something can be fragile even though it is never in fact struck or dropped. Similarly for a soluble sugar cube, or an elastic band.
Logical behaviorism, take 1:

S is in mental state M if and only if S behaves in such-and-such ways.
E.g. S is in pain if and only if S writhes, groans, etc.

Problems: for discussion

Logical behaviorism, take 2:

S is in mental state M if and only if S is disposed to behave in such-and-such ways.
E.g. S is in pain if and only if S is disposed to (has a tendency to/is inclined to) writhe, groan, etc.

Problems: for discussion