



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**PHILOSOPHICAL BEHAVIOURISM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

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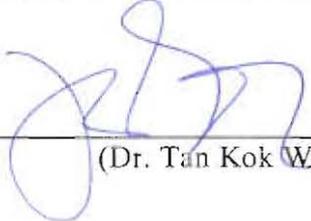
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## ABSTRACT

### PHILOSOPHICAL BEHAVIOURISM: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Melisa Abby David Jemut

This study aims to examine critically the central thesis of philosophical behaviourism. The objectives of this study are to explain what is behaviourism and more specifically philosophical behaviourism. Mainly, this study explores the arguments for and against philosophical behaviourism. This study has generally accomplished the objectives set out. The major finding is that philosophical behaviourism is largely discredited due to its weaknesses. Some of its major tenets that claim, for instance, that mind is behaviour and the total denial of inner mental states are unacceptable. It is hoped that the thesis has contributed something useful to the literature.

## **ABSTRAK**

### *FALSAFAH TINGKAHLAKU: ANALISIS SECARA KRITIKAL*

Melisa Abby David Jemut

*Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara kritikal isu-isu asas falsafah tingkahlaku. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menjelaskan maksud tingkahlaku dan secara khususnya falsafah tingkahlaku. Khususnya, kajian ini dijalankan untuk menerokai perbincangan atau fakta yang menyokong dan membantah falsafah tingkahlaku. Kajian ini secara amnya telah mencapai objektif yang telah disenaraikan. Dapatan kajian mendapati bahawa falsafah tingkahlaku telah ditolak oleh ahli-ahli falsafah kerana terdapat banyak kelemahan. Sesetengah pandangan utamanya yang menyatakan bahawa minda adalah tingkahlaku dan juga pengabaianya terhadap mental dalaman adalah tidak diterima. Diharapkan bahawa kajian ini telah menyumbangkan sesuatu yang berguna untuk kajian dalam bidang ini.*

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Beginning

Graham (2002: 1) pointed out that behaviourism identifies mind with behaviour because “behave is what organisms do”. *Behaviourism* is built on this assumption, and its goal is to promote the scientific study of behaviour. Behaviourism is actually a doctrine, or set of doctrines, about human and nonhuman animal behaviour. In this chapter, we would trace back the origin of the idea.

A study by Gardner (1985: 10-16) points out that early behaviourists brought up two very significant propositions. The first one says that every researcher engaged in a science of behaviour should restrict themselves to public methods of observations, whereby any scientist could relate and measure. There should not also be any internal or private introspections: every element of science ought to be observable and explained physically.

Secondly, those interested in a science of behaviour should be emphasizing completely on the “behaviour” itself: diligently avoiding the internal processes of the mind such as cognition, or imagination and conceptual framework such of intentions, desires or plans. Furthermore, they are also not allowed to entertain hypothetical mental constructs like symbols, ideas, schemas, or any other possible forms of mental representation.

In 1912, John B. Watson proposed a manifesto to discard the introspectionist attempts that make consciousness a subject of experimental investigation but focus

instead on behavioural manifestations of intelligence. Shortly afterwards, B.F. Skinner toughen up behaviourist strictures to exclude inner physiological processes along with inward experiences as items of legitimate psychological matter (Hauser, 2002: 1).

Behaviourism took a decidedly philosophical turn following the most philosophically important type of behaviourism, often called logical or philosophical behaviourism, which is associated with Gilbert Ryle (Clark, 2001: 165). Ryle (1999: 317) argues that, with the exception of pain, all of our mental states can be analyzed through our behaviour, and he denies that our mental states reflect anything more than a predictable way of acting.

It is indeed a movement in psychology and philosophy, which exhibit a highlight on the outward behavioural aspects of thought, and conceals the inward experiential and maybe sometimes the inner procedural aspects. However, in this thesis, I would like to focus on the philosophical aspect of behaviourism.

### **1.1.1 Bypassing Cartesian Dualism – The Reactions Against Dualism**

From a philosophical perspective, behaviourism bypassed Cartesian Dualism – Descartes' theory that the mind and body are two separate "substances" that are contingently related. The demise of dualism is one of the main reasons for the emergence of behaviourism. We would hence examine this first before discussing behaviourism in more detail later.

Dualism talks about the mind as a non-physical entity (Warburton, 1999: 131). René Descartes claims that each time we introspect, or reflect on

our own thinking, having feeling, emotions and beliefs, it is impossible to discover any physical property. This means that emotions are essential and important as it determines the personality of a person somehow, it could not simply be evaluated as having character such as colour, size or even shape (Clark, 2001: 162).

The Cartesian conception claims that the mental is essentially private and subjective and it also declares that mental states are essentially conscious experiences: only the one to whom a mental phenomenon occurred would be able to know what he or she is experiencing.

Gilbert Ryle, a philosophical behaviourist claims that Descartes is wrong to think that our outward actions or behaviour is evidence for an inner state that causes our behaviour (Ego, 2001: 1). Consider Ryle's example of attentive listening. Dualism would put this into *two* acts. Firstly, the physical process of receiving sound, and secondly, the mental process of "attending" which causes our listening to be attentive (Ryle, 1999: 317).

Nevertheless, according to Ryle, in describing a person's mind we are describing the ways in which parts of his or her conduct are managed. Listening should not be characterised as a physical action, while being attentive as a mental action, he argues that there is merely one process characterised as "attentive listening" (Ryle, 1999: 317).

Ryle says that by using psychological predicates as reference to a private mental item, we are making a category mistake. Ryle's example of a category mistake is an analogy of a university. A visitor would see all the things that make up the university - the library, the halls of residence, the

students and the lecturers - but the visitor would be mistaken in thinking there was some separate "object" which was called "university" (Ryle, 1999: 319-320). Dualism looks for a mental object that can pick out something named attentive but Ryle disagrees. Consider for example the capturing of the phenomena of a melting ice cube. Melting is not actually some hidden "object" which is a separate thing to the ice cube; the ice cube is predisposed to melt at any temperature above 0°C. Melting is simply the behaviour of the ice cube, not a separate part of it, as "attentive" is merely the behaviour of the subject. This illustration is another analogy to illuminate Ryle's conception of the category mistake.

Other forms of Dualism include epiphenomenalism, parallelism, and property dualism. The epiphenomenalist holds that the body affects the mind, but not vice-versa. The mind only appears to affect the body, because the apparent mental causes of bodily changes (like the decision to lift my arm) coincide with the true bodily causes (some change in my brain). Parallelists hold that mind and body are two substances that do not interact at all. This is usually indicated through our ordinary experiences. Heil (1998: 27) stated that mental states seem to affect the body in certain ways, and through it, affecting the material world beyond our body. However, it appears implausible that "events and objects in the world" encompass an influence on the mind in the same way it affects the body. Simply said, parallelists believe that the mind and body occur parallel to each other but they do not influence each other.

On the other hand, property dualism maintains that the mind can be identified with the brain (or with the body as a whole), but mental properties

cannot be reduced to physical ones. On this view, it is my brain which is responsible for sensation, perception and other mental phenomena. But the fact that my brain is thinking a certain thought, for example, is an additional fact about it, one that cannot be reduced to any of its physical properties (Perry and Bratman, 1999: 806).

It is claimed that Dualism as a philosophical theory of mind is ultimately uninformative (Clark, 2001: 162). Often, it tells us of what the mind could not possibly be such that the mind is not a body, nor a brain or anything else that is physically observable by the bare eyes. But, it never addresses the question of what the mind possibly is.

### **1.1.2 Varieties of Behaviourism**

Behaviourism is committed in its fullest and most complete sense to the truth of the following three set of claims (Graham, 2002: 1-2):

- (1) Psychology is the science of behaviour. Psychology is not the science of mind.
- (2) Behaviour can be described and explained without making reference to mental events or to internal psychological processes. The sources of behaviour are external (in the environment), not internal (in the mind).
- (3) In the course of theory development in psychology, if, somehow, mental terms or concepts are deployed in describing or explaining behaviour, then either (a) these terms or concepts should be eliminated and replaced by behavioural terms or (b) they can and should be translated or paraphrased into behavioural concepts.

These three set of claims are logically distinct. Moreover, taken independently, each helps to form a type of behaviourism. “Methodological” behaviourism is committed to the truth of (1). “Psychological” behaviourism

is committed to the truth of (2). “Philosophical” behaviourism (also known as “Analytical” or “Logical” behaviourism) is committed to the truth of the statement in (3) that mental terms or concepts can and should be translated into behavioural concepts.

Methodological behaviourism is a normative theory about the scientific conduct of psychology. It claims that psychology should concern itself with the behaviour of organisms (human and nonhuman animals). Psychology should not concern itself with mental states or events or with constructing internal information processing accounts of behaviour. According to methodological behaviourism, reference to mental events (such as an animal's beliefs or desires) adds nothing to what psychology can and should understand about the sources of behaviour. Mental events are private entities which, given the necessary publicity of science, do not form proper objects of empirical study. Methodological behaviourism is a dominant theme in the writings of John Watson (Prinz, n.d.: 1).

As stated by Graham (2002: 2), psychological behaviourism is a research program within psychology. It purports to explain human and animal behaviour in terms of external physical stimuli, responses, learning histories, and (for certain types of behaviour) reinforcements. Psychological behaviourism is present in the work of Ivan Pavlov, Edward Thorndike, as well as Watson (Hauser, 2002: 3). Its fullest and most influential expression is Skinner's work on schedules of reinforcement (Graham, 2002: 2).

As an illustration of psychological behaviourism, consider Watson's work which was based on the experiments of Ivan Pavlov, who had studied

animals' responses to conditioning. In Pavlov's best-known experiment, he rang a bell as he fed some dogs several meals. Each time the dogs heard the bell they knew that a meal was coming, and they would begin to salivate. Pavlov then rang the bell without bringing food, but the dogs still salivated. They had been "conditioned" to salivate at the sound of a bell. Pavlov believed, as Watson was later to emphasize, that humans react to stimuli in the same way (DeMar, n.d.: 1).

On the other hand, philosophical behaviourism is a theory within philosophy about the meaning or semantics of mental terms or concepts. It states that the very notion of a mental state or condition is the notion of a behavioural disposition or family of behavioural tendencies. When we attribute a belief to someone, for example, we are not saying that he or she is in a particular internal state or condition. Instead, we are characterizing the person in terms of what he or she might do in particular situations (Graham, 2002: 2). Philosophical behaviourism is found in the work of Gilbert Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* (1949) and the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein in *The Philosophical Investigation* (Hauser, 2002: 7).

### **1.1.3 The World of Philosophical Behaviourism**

Behaviourism means different things to philosophers and psychologists. In philosophy, philosophical behaviourism is usually formulated as the doctrine that statements about the mental have the same meaning as (are analytically equivalent to) statements about behaviour. Those who contrast

private, introspectible mental phenomena such as pains and publicly observable behaviour are mistaken. For, to give a crude example, the behaviourist holds that the statement “she is in pain” means the same as (is analytically equivalent to) the statement “she is manifesting aversion behaviour” (Kim, 1996: 38).

As mentioned earlier, Gilbert Ryle is the precursor of philosophical behaviourism, he wanted to show that Descartes had created a myth which divided the world up into mental and physical substances. Some behaviourists have accepted the idea that there simply are no phenomena of mind, that the mind is a kind of fiction superimposed on the complex movements of human bodies — which simply implies that the mind is a non-existent substance altogether (Warburton, 1999: 140-141). Such extreme eliminativist behaviourism was certainly never part of Ryle’s project. However, there is a kind of behaviourism which treats the mind not as fiction but as definable in terms of behaviour. The real question is how far Ryle can be understood as advocating this sort of view.

Demjançuk (2000: 6) states that Ryle regarded the very question of whether the world is ultimately physical as conceptually confused. He spoke of agential behavioural dispositions, and showed little inclination to analyse this away in terms of physical behavioural dispositions. Ryle (1999: 319) was chiefly concerned to deflate the idea that there must be complex inner mental processes behind a person’s public actions and to show how this dissolved the problem of other minds. Ryle (1999: 319) speaks about “category mistakes”, which consists in taking one kind of thing for another as when the confused

tourist says that he has seen all the college buildings in Oxford, but has yet to find the University. What the tourist has failed to buildings.

Applied to the mind, the idea seems to be this: it is easy to be misled into thinking it is a special kind of thing, different from, but belonging to, the same general category as the matter that makes up the physical world. Demjançuk (2000: 6) also reinforces Ryle's belief that "the hallowed contrast between mind and matter will be dissipated, but dissipated not by either of the equally hallowed absorptions of mind by matter or of matter by mind".

Demjançuk (2000: 6) also agrees with the suggestion from Ryle that when one tries to find the difference between intelligence and lack of it, one should not look for some special mind stuff, the operation of which makes someone intelligent. One should be asking by what criterion intelligent behaviour is actually distinguished from non-intelligent behaviour. In this and in numerous other examples, Ryle (Demjançuk, 2000: 6) suggests that the mind consists in patterns of behaviour and that to think otherwise about it is precisely to categorise it wrongly. In Ryle's examples, behaviour is always treated as fully intentional, there is no attempt to characterise it in non-mental, physical terms. In spite of the difficulties of interpretation, Ryle's conception of mind contains specific, important insights into mental processes. Some of the things Ryle says might even encourage one to think his position is an early form of functionalism.

Philosophers have two main objections to behaviourism. First, behaviourists hold that statements about the mental mean the same as statements about behaviour, but it seems understandable that mental

phenomena cause behaviour. Pain cannot be identified with aversion behaviour; “she is in pain” cannot mean the same as “she is manifesting aversion behaviour”, because pain causes aversion behaviour. The second objection depends on two thought experiments. Kim (1996: 37) proposes to consider a race of “Super Spartans” who do feel pain, but behave as though they do not. It will sometimes be true of a “Super Spartan” that “she is in pain”, but false of her that “she is manifesting aversion behaviour”. Therefore, these two statements do not have the same meaning. Now consider a group of perfect actors. They do not feel pain, but act as if they do. So, it would sometimes be true of a perfect actor that “she is manifesting aversion behaviour”, but false of her that “she is in pain”. Therefore, these two statements do not have the same meaning.

If behaviourism were true it would solve the mind-body problem. For if statements about the mental have the same meaning as statements about behaviour (mental = behaviour), then (presumably) mental phenomena would just be behavioural phenomena. Highlighting once again, being in pain would just be manifesting aversion behaviour. But the relation between behaviour and the body is straightforward. So if behaviourism were true, the relation between mental phenomena and the body would be unproblematic.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

The purpose of literature review is to review and evaluate published literature on philosophical behaviourism. It identifies the philosophical underpinnings

embedded in the literature and highlight what is known and shows how the results of research by previous scholars are related to the study.

In the mid-twentieth century, the “ordinary language” movement sparkled most brightly in the work of Ryle and Wittgenstein, which are strongly related to philosophical behaviourism. Their investigations are “meant to throw light on the facts of our language” in its everyday employment (Hauser, 2002). One who misinterprets talk of people “as knowing, believing, or guessing something, as hoping, dreading, intending or shirking something, as designing this or being amused at that” (Ryle, 1999: 319) on the model of scientific hypotheses about inner mechanisms misinterprets the “logical grammar” (Hauser, 2002) of such talk, or makes a “category-mistake” (Ryle, 1999: 319). Such misconstrual is a philosophical perplexity on knowledge of other minds and mind-body interaction: for instance, attempts to solve the mind-body problem “presuppose the legitimacy of the disjunction, ‘either there exist minds or there exist bodies (but not both)’ which would be like saying, ‘either she bought a left-hand and a right-hand glove or she bought a pair of gloves (but not both)’ ” (Ryle, 1999: 323).

Probably, the most basic misconstrual in philosophy which Wittgenstein and Ryle seem to agree in their diagnoses, engrosses in thinking on the way human thinks; when we talk of “knowing, believing, or guessing, that these verbs are supposed to denote the occurrence of specific either ‘mechanical’ (in brains) or ‘paramechanical’ (in streams of consciousness): as a result we have to deny the yet uncomprehended process in the yet unexplored medium” (Hauser, 2002: 7). And now, it looks as if we have denied the mental processes. And naturally we don't want to deny them.

In another case, Chemero (n.d.: 1) positioned Ryle as a philosopher who had contributed significant relevance towards the current philosophical issues, especially in the philosophy of cognitive science and mind. Ryle's work, *The Concept of Mind* is beneficially applied and analysed in the field of cognitive science for the last decade, models of cognition which do not make use of sentence-like, internal representations are becoming popular and much emphasized. "Highly successful research on connectionist networks, situated robots, and dynamical systems models have made it seem less and less plausible that the mind is a storehouse of sentences" (Chemero, n.d.: 1). A question that emerges here the issue whether the novel and upcoming view about the mind is helping us to understand thought despite the scientific methods previously executed has discovered the details in promoting that "thoughts are not inner sentences" (Chemero, n.d.: 1-2). But then again, if our best science of the mind shows that there are no inner sentences, how do we understand thought?

Chemero (n.d.: 2) added that Ryle's explanation of the mind from *The Concept of Mind*, is quite a huge work. Ryle provides a path in comprehending thought in which inner sentences do not exist. Despite the heavy attention Chemero has on the whole work of Ryle, he singles out three main components worthy to be discussed, conveyed by Ryle in *The Concept of Mind*, rediscovered (brought back to life) recently by philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists: "the primacy of knowledge how (knowledge of knowing how), the intrinsic connection between thought and action, and anti-representationalism, the idea that thinking is not the processing of representations" (Chemero, n.d.: 2). These three issues were among the more important ones discussed in the philosophy of mind or cognitive science. Surprisingly, Ryle according to Chemero, "had set these positions out convincingly and in great

detail, long before anyone had built a mobile robot” (n.d.: 2), even though Ryle is scarcely mentioned in many of these debates.

A good brief history of recent philosophy of mind and a survey of current issues is provided by one of the leading philosophers in this area, Daniel Dennett. Chemero stated that Dennett points out in the writing of *The Concept of Mind* there exist current trends in which resounded some of Rylean themes: “embodied and ‘situated’ cognition: your mind is not in your brain; skill is not represented; intelligence without representation” (n.d.: 4) — to name only the most obvious. Dennett, who is the mentee of Gilbert Ryle himself, also suggests something that is quite unexpected, stating that “*The Concept of Mind* is not, after all, a deep book. Instead, it is wonderfully, importantly shallow” (Dennett, 1999: 1). However, Chemero mentioned a part where Dennett (n.d.: 4) added that this shallowness has somehow made its way in conveying the most important thing about Ryle’s philosophical approach. He indicates repeatedly that complex and deep problems could be made simpler and might even be totally diminished. Other than that, Dennett also provides an explanation of Ryle’s *The Concept of Mind* by outlining the rise and fall of the ordinary language analysis, “a fall which parallels a corresponding decline in the domination of psychology by behaviourism” (Cole, Fetzer & Rankin, 1990: 12).

### 1.3 Problem Statement

As the literature indicates, the theory of philosophical behaviourism has had its adherents and critiques. However, as we are all well aware, philosophical behaviourism has been discredited. Since its inception, it has been heavily attacked

and criticised. Thus, the thesis would set out to review the arguments for and against philosophical behaviourism especially the criticisms that lead to the downfall of the theory.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Research**

Specifically, the aim of this study is to examine critically the central thesis of philosophical or analytical behaviourism. Hence, the work would begin with a general exposition of the theory. Subsequently, the thesis would focus on the following research objectives:

- i. What is behaviourism? What makes it important and why is it widely discussed?
- ii. What is philosophical behaviourism? Who are the precursors?
- iii. Explore questions discussed by philosophers where arguments for (which may not be abundantly available as behaviourism has been refuted) and arguments against philosophical behaviourism are discussed.

Finally, upon reviewing the arguments from both sides of philosophical behaviourism, I would then sum up the work with a conclusion and wherever possible I would contribute to the literature with some of my own criticisms.

#### **1.5 Research Scope and Limitations**

The scope of the research is limited to reviewing, contrasting and analysing the theories and arguments forwarded by philosophers in the discussion of philosophical or analytical behaviourism. This research is limited by the constraints of time and

limited sources of books. The prime source of references is obtained mainly through books, articles, and journals from UNIMAS CAIS (Universiti Malaysia of Sarawak, Centre of Academic and Information Service) and the World Wide Web of the Internet.

## **1.6 Chapters Organization**

The first chapter as introductory chapter would explore in great length what philosophical or analytical behaviourism is all about. Furthermore, this chapter would bring to the examination of related works from the past related to the topic I am working on and leads eventually to the objectives and scopes of research. Then the second chapter would discuss the defending philosophers' views toward issues arising from philosophical behaviourism. The third chapter would look at critiques levelled against the theory. Finally, in the conclusion chapter, I would try to sum up the issues discussed and at the same time discuss some opinions of my own.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

Despite the fact that behaviourism is adopted differently in various fields in philosophy and psychology, philosophical behaviourism has gained influence and criticisms through decades of the evolution of behaviourism. In psychology, behaviourism is a twentieth-century movement which maintains that behaviour is the mind and is a creditable way to study mental phenomena scientifically. It opposes the introspective methods for the study of mind emphasized in much psychology of the