

RYLE'S CONCEPT OF THE CATEGORY-MISTAKE

□ JAGAT PAL
Lecturer in Philosophy,
Jain Viśva Bhārati.
LĀDNŪ

□

The present well-known and widely used phrase, "The Category-Mistake" was coined and introduced by Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* (C. M. 1949). He employed it in order to point out a serious fallacy which is allegedly involved in a sort of metaphysical thinking, which according to Ryle, is best represented in cartesian philosophy. But it is, nevertheless, not confined to mere pointing out this kind of mistake in the writings of Descartes alone. It is applicable to many instances of similar kinds of philosophizing in pre-and-post cartesian times. "The Category-Mistake asserts a logical point which is much wider in scope and may be compared with Moore's "Naturalistic Fallacy" and Saṅkara's concept of 'Adhyāsa' or 'Superimposition'.

In pointing out the particular examples of the commission of 'the category mistake', Ryle has in fact, made a good attempt towards dealing with the mind-body problem; but unfortunately, he did not fully succeed and ultimately, opened a bag of troubles for philosophers, of course, there is no doubt that he has provided us with new techniques of analysis to deal with typical controversial philosophical problems. But a careful examination reveals a lot of inconsistencies and incompleteness underlying his basic principle which is itself based on certain untenable assumptions. The purpose of this paper is to show the inconsistencies and shortcomings underlying Ryle's formulation of the concept of the category-mistake and to defend the ontological status of mind, which is different from the body, though mind is indeed typically involved in bodily process. It further makes it difficult to know 'mind,' apart from bodily activities. We shall try to explain why Ryle's usual examples do not help us to understand the relation between mind and body. For this purpose, let us, however, start with the presentation of Ryle's views before pointing out our own ideas.

Ryle's claim that mind is not the name of another *person* functioning behind impenetrable screen, it is not the name of another place where work is done or games are played, it is not the name of another tool with which work is done or another appliance with which certain objects are made. Mind does not demonstrate an entity or substance, hidden in the human personality, operating upon human behaviours in certain specific manner. The word 'mind' does not stand for a thing which is located in particular space as is the case with the body. It is only an organised set of functions (thinking, feelings, volitions, emotions, desires, will and so on). Besides these



contents there is nothing as such, hidden in the core of the human personality which can be called by the name 'mind'. It does not designate any mysterious or occult episode under the influence of which, the functions of body are occurring. Thinking, emotions, feelings, volitions and so on are the constituents of the mind which constitute its frame. Over and above these constituents it has independent status, "mind is invisible, inaudible, inner operator, controller of human activities, and only individuals have 'privileged access' to their minds etc", are statements based on false assumptions. Mind and bodies do not belong, on Ryle's own showing, to the logical type or category. They stand for two separate categories which are quite different from one another. Accordingly, it would be a big mistake to conjoin or disjoin them. For strengthening his claim Ryle has cited various paradigmatic situations. Consider following statements :

A foreigner visiting Oxford or Cambridge for the first time is shown a number of colleges, libraries, playing fields, museums, scientific departments and administrative offices. He then asked 'But where is the University ? I have seen where the members of the colleges live, where the Registrar works, where the scientists experiment and the rest. But I have not yet seen the University, in which reside and work the members of your University. It has then to be explained to him that the University is not another collateral institution, some ulterior counterpart to the colleges, laboratories and offices which he has seen. The University is just the way in which all that he has already seen is organized. When they are seen and when their co-ordination is understood, the University has been seen. His mistake lay in his innocent assumption that it was correct to speak of Christ Church, the Bodleian Library, the Ashmolean museum and the University, to speak, that is as if 'the University' stood for an extra member of the class of which these other units are members. He was mistakenly allocating the University to the same category as that to which the other institutions belong (C. M. p. 16).

Ryle has clearly shown in this analogy that the University and its organs (i. e. libraries, playing fields, museums, scientific departments, administrative offices and so on) do not belong to the same sort of category but different types of categories. The stranger clearly did not understand these two distinct types of categories and has located the existence of the University in the same manner as their organs are which is not justifiable on logical grounds. The University has no independent existential status in isolation from its organs. Similarly, mind and body belong to two different sorts of categories rather than one and mind does not exist over and above the body. Does this analogy apply to the concept of mind and body ! Is it a correct and an appropriate analogy ? All these questions Ryle declares unhesitatingly in the positive way. But on our understanding, this cannot be the case. It is worth noting that on Ryle's own showing, minds and bodies belong to different logical types but they have quite opposite qualities like light and darkness. In case of the University there is no such case. The University has not distinct feature and qualities in isolation from its organs. Hence, the analogy of the University is insufficient and not applicable to the concept of mind and body and his argument never gets off the ground. In order to substantiate this observation, further, we may point out a similar difficulty with respect to the type of category-mistake. Mind is neither an organised set of feelings, emotions, volitions, ideas, thoughts, desires and so on; nor these are constituents of mind in virtue of which its existence is possible. Feelings, emotions, thoughts all these contents are activities or operations of mind, not mind itself. Their cognition is, of course, possible in virtue of presupposing a mind. Ryle unfortunately could not discriminate between mind and its occurrences and has wrongly identified

them. Just as running, walking and so on are bodily functions not body itself. Similarly, thoughts, feelings, emotions, volitions are activities of mind, not mind itself. Our point is that if the *advocate of the argument* is pressed, right at the beginning to define the category-mistake he confronts serious and insurmountable difficulties and it becomes clear that he cannot proceed with the argument without making controversial statements. Mental qualities and its occurrences are not qualities and occurrences of body. Though it is quite obvious that we cannot observe mind in isolation from the body, yet its knowledge is apprehensible only in relation to the body, but thereby this does not follow that mind has no ontological status. To use concepts 'wrongly is thus not simply to say something false about the world but to misuse language,' says Lewis (Laird A. and D. Lewis : Moore and Ryle : Two Ontologists Vol. II p. 17, 1965). Hence, it seems quite rational to accept that the mind-body problem is not like the problem of the University and its organs. We submit that such an analogy is mistaken and powerless, for it is futile to pretend that mind and bodies exist in the same manner as the University and its organs.

Let us consider Ryle's another argument. He says "It is perfectly proper to say, in logical tone of voice, that there exist minds and to say, in another logical tone of voice, that there exist bodies. But these expressions do not indicate two different species of existence for 'existence' is not a generic word like 'coloured' or 'sexed'. They indicate two different senses of exist, some what as 'rising' has different senses in 'the tide is rising,' 'hopes are rising' and 'the average of death is rising'. A man would be thought to be making a poor joke who said that three things are now rising, namely the tide, hopes and the average age of death. It would be just as good or bad a joke to say that there exist prime members and Wednesdays and public opinions and navies! or that there exist both minds and bodies". (C. M. p. 23).

Further, "I am not, for example, denying that there occur mental processes. Doing long division is a mental process and so is making a joke. But I am saying that the phrase 'there occur mental processes' does not mean the same sort of thing as there occur physical processes and therefore, that it makes no sense to conjoin or disjoin the two (CM. p. 22). The minds and bodies do not exist in the same senses of 'exist' but exist in different senses of 'exist'. What does it mean? Does it mean that there is no mind? Certainly, not. Analysis of the whole proposition demonstrates the fact that he is not denying the existence of mind. He is only making two different kinds of statements viz. that "mind exists in one sense of the term exist and body exists in another sense of the term 'exist' without repudiating the existence of mind. Indeed, we agree with him that minds and bodies exist in different senses of 'exist' but this does not mean that mind has no separate ontological status. If it is not so. There will be no meaning in saying that minds and bodies exist in different senses of 'exist' and the whole proposition becomes meaningless. Of course, minds and bodies belong to different logical types or categories and it is also true that we cannot conjoin or disjoin them. This suggestion seems nice and interesting. But the question arises, 'why do they belong to different sorts of categories'. This simply means that both are 'ontologically different,' otherwise there is no sense in saying that minds and bodies exist in different senses of 'exist'. His argument leads him to accept indirectly the ontological status of the mind and the body which he himself refuses to accept.

Addis in his article on Ryle observed that The ordinary use of this word 'exist' allows its replacement by 'there are'. In this use, 'exist' is univocal and indefinable, prime number,

Wednesdays *etc.* are all there. They all exist. It is not because of different senses of exist that it is good or bad joke to say in one breath that both Wednesdays and number exist. It is one, if at all, because number and Wednesdays are quite different sorts of things. Hence, it is clear from these statements made by Addis that Ryle himself is confused in using several senses of 'exist'. One main reason why Ryle engages in constructing argument for the existence of minds and bodies is that he wants to assure himself that his belief in the existence of minds and bodies are rationally grounded. But the situation is radically different; the minds and bodies are ontologically different categories and this is also manifested in Rylean analysis of the concept of mind.

Again troubles are many for the philosophers pertaining to the concept of "category". His concept of the category-mistake presupposes a particular concept of category which has specific kinds of features. But unfortunately, he has not given us clear idea as to what he means by 'category'. He only says that, a category means a type (analogous to Russell's type which can legitimately be called meaningful within a universe of discourse. What can or cannot be asserted about something will form the boundary line of one category as opposed to other. But such a generalised theory is not applicable to each and everything. If it is accepted as a fact then certainly there may be many categories as there are or there can be actual or possible objects and ideas. Hence, we cannot ever imagine of grouping things together except in the case where the relation of identity holds. For such reason G. J. Warnock in his book *Philosophy since 1900* remarks, "If one is not prepared to say what is a category and what the categories there are, can one really be entitled to employ the term category". This statement of Warnock exhibits that Ryle's concept of 'category' is incompatible with its nature.

Stuart Hampshire in his review article on *The Concept of Mind* (Mind 1950) says that 'Professor Ryle has from the beginning confused a general feature of common language with a particular metaphysical theory; it is never clear precisely whom he is attacking when he attacks the Ghost and therefore what weapons are appropriate. His own explanations of his method (pp. 1, 8, 16, 17, 21-23) unfortunately involve such notorious obscure expressions as 'Logical Category', 'Logical Type' and 'The sort of thing which is meant by ; obscure, because they at first look like distinctions in actual grammar (see p. 101) but, where attacked with counter examples, turn into some ideal 'Logical grammar' (p. 244); in fact behind this ideal grammar there is implied this literalist theory of language, which betrays itself in many of the arguments used!'. We agree with Hampshire that the purposes of metaphorical statements are only to make sense to spectators to understand some specific concepts. It is never used in literal senses of meaning. It would be a big mistake to use metaphorical statement in literal sense. Ryle could not understand this fact and has taken senses of metaphorical statements in literal senses of meaning which is completely undesirable and unacceptable. Whenever traditional philosophers and followers of the official doctrine have used this term 'ghost' for mind, the purpose was only to show that the mind is not perceptible through our naked eyes or empirical instruments. Senses have no power to know it, because all kinds of knowledge presuppose its existence. Hence, as Hampshire has tried to show, it follows that Ryle is not protesting against philosophical theory of mind but against a universal feature of ordinary language itself. Again, in the same article Hampshire proclaims that Ryle himself claims that Categorical-Hypothetical distinction is not sufficient for explaining certain concepts. He himself claims that such translation in case of emotional agitations and soliloquies are not always possible. In the original plan of the book he himself has made Categorical-Hypo-



thetical Statements about events and ordinary words. One of the main confusions in Ryle's *Concept of Mind* is the use of Categorical-Hypothetical distinction borrowed from logic to make a distinction which is not strictly logical. Ryle's view that to give reasons for accepting or rejecting such statements must always involve hypothetical statements about overt behaviours is due to his thinking that meaning is identical with the verification. But in fact, the overt behaviours indicate that meaning is not identical with verifications.

Michael Scriven in his article 'The Mechanical Concept of Mind' (Mind 1953) maintains that overt behaviour does not always and necessarily give sufficient account of consciousness. The evidence is appropriate only if we have the other vital evidence which may serve the purpose of acting as the inference licence. As he says, "behaviour is attached to consciousness as pain is to torture; the one does not guarantee the other but is guaranteed by it!" All these statements support our view that mind and body both have separate status from each other and are essential feature of human personality. Indeed, we cannot know mind, apart from the body; its knowledge is possible only in relation to the body, but it does not mean that the mind is the body. No conscious and deliberate activity is possible in the absence of mind. Moreover, only conscious body can operate on many sorts of things where as the ranges of unconscious activity is quite limited. Hence, minds and bodies are essential feature of human personality. Human existence is impossible in the absence of any one of them. Both are real; though their union in human beings remains a mystery for many philosophers even in the present century.

But Ryle cannot be daunted by such failure. He further defends his theory of mind by claiming that mental conduct concepts are not definable terms of cognitions. Cognitive statements are open hypothetical dispositional statements or semi-hypothetical dispositional statements which demonstrate only certain tendencies, capacities or abilities of human beings (see C. M. pp. 50, 51, 117, 118). Theorising is not an activity of mind which separates mental activities from physical occurrences and indicates two different processes. For Ryle bodily and mental processes are not two different and distinct processes but one process. For evidence he has cited various examples, (See CM pp. 51, 142, 143). It is, of course, worth-noting that in some cases at least mental activities are perceptible in human behaviours. But thereby we cannot infer definitely and necessarily that it holds in all cases. It is not only hard but also impossible to know in certain cases about others' minds. Ryle's criterion of knowing about others' minds becomes unsatisfactory and undesirable in the case of silence. We have no instrument to know in case of silence about mental activities of others' minds whether he is thinking or not and about what he is thinking. We fully agree with Hampshire on this point. Against Ryle, Hampshire maintains in his review article on *The Concept of Mind* (1949) that individual has 'Privileged Access' to his own states of mind. First person reports about mental activities may or may not always be reducible to statements about perceptible behaviour. When I am silent, others have no criteria to have access to my state of mind. Only I can know what I am thinking. You can only guess whether one is thinking or not, but you cannot say anything about what one is thinking. In this sense, it is obvious that everyone has 'Privileged Access' to his mind and others have no such 'Privileged Access'. Therefore, on Ryle's showing 'some of the legitimate uses of such statements have been debarred from the range of meaningful utterances. There are, indeed, many cases where these terms do have cognitively legitimate uses in ordinary language. But our point is that Ryle has definitely narrowed down the criteria of knowing which is totally unsatisfactory. It is never possible to know exactly and definitely about others' minds in

all cases. Another point which we want to maintain in this paper is that Ryle could not clearly understand the difference between mental and bodily processes and had identified both of them as the process which is not justifiable. It does not matter in the least whether the two belong to the same substance or not, that is a different issue. We are also not in favour of those philosophers who maintain transcendental reality of mind. But surely it is quite probable that mental and bodily processes are totally different because both have qualities opposite to and distinct from one another. This directly indicates that there are two processes rather than one process.

A. C. Ewing in his article, 'Prof. Ryle's attack on Dualism' (Process of the Aristotelian Society, 1952-53) has maintained that, "Throughout our life there are two qualitatively quite different groups of processes taking place in us, one consisting of sensations, emotions, cognitions, as psychological events, the other of bodily movements. These two are generically different in character. The qualities of each are dissimilar in the extreme and their relation to consciousness is quite different". Besides these, "It is only through mental that the physical is known, and all intrinsic value resides in the former, the latter being of value only as a means not as an end in itself. 'Because of misunderstanding Ryle fails to discriminate between mental and physical processes and has insulated them into one process which cannot rationally be maintained. We agree with Ewing because if two processes are entirely different from each other, it legitimately follows that both are ontologically different. For Ryle, dispositions are not meaningful in the absence of any occurrences, though as a matter of fact, disposition may be meaningful in the absence of occurrences. In Ryle's view there seems to be a confusion between 'meaning' and 'evidence'. Moreover, a disposition cannot properly be explained in terms of possibilities.

To conclude our own view, minds and bodies both are ontologically different from each other & are present in human personality. Of course, both exist in different sense of 'exist' and belong to different logical types or categories. But it would be fallacious to negate anyone of them. Ryle could not understand clearly the nature of mind and misconstrued his argument which can never get off the ground. He cannot proceed with his argument without making controversial statements. His own argument leads him indirectly to accept the ontological status of both the minds and the bodies which he himself refuses to accept. It is clear enough that both are ontologically present in human personality and are operating together. We cannot legitimately negate either of these. If we do so, the answer will be unsatisfactory and cannot logically be sustained. Hence, we can understand mind as different from the body, though not apart from the body,

□