Behaviourism II

Phil 255
In Philosophy: Ryle

- Philosophical views mirrored those of the logical positivists
- Philosophy should have a clarificatory role
- The science of interest to him was psychology
- Derided Cartesian dualism for positing a “ghost in the machine”
- Accused most psychologists of a serious “category mistake”
- He didn’t deny the existence of mind, just thought most psychologists mis-characterized the concept
Criticism of standard usage

- Begins by sketching opposing view: a “folk psychological” description of thinking
- But thinking is more than just ‘theoretical deduction’: it’s everywhere, all the time
- He notes a “puzzling element” in this standard characterization
  - Puzzling because it’s unlike all other pursuits (singing, etc.)
- We can’t answer a variety of straightforward questions about thinking
- We shouldn’t think of thinking as being the moving around of some kind of stuff
- Thinking just is a kind of behaviour
Positive View

- Considers a number of examples of thinking: rowing; admiring roses (p.99)
- Ryle points out that there “incipient thoughts,” related to the main topics, i.e., thinking is somehow directed, or dispositional
- People don’t ‘forget’ threshold thoughts, they just don’t always report them
  - Hence, thoughts are ‘constitutionally inceptive’
- Can answer the two dominant problems:
  - Chronicling:
  - Mind-stuff:
  - “thinking is not a rival occupation to the special occupations”
Troubles with behaviourism

- Trouble 1: Diffuseness
- **Externalism** limits available kinds of explanation
  - E.g., emotion explanations needed to be dispositional
    - Anger, love expressed by any number of behavioural acts
    - Highly contextual, hence infinite list
- Such explanations will require long **disjunctive lists** of behaviour
- Circularity: What groups a set of behaviours as related?
Need a ‘self’ to evaluate (or at least a physiological context)

Watson thought that emotion was the sensation of visceral changes

- removes autonomy

- physiological changes don’t always result in overt behavioural ones

- are visceral changes variable enough?

Maybe have a broader definition of ‘physiology’?

- Even less autonomy
Trouble 2: Privacy

- Explaining the ‘easy’ cases for introspectionists: e.g.,
  - Watson’s solution:
    - thinking is simply truncated speech (recall problems)
  - Skinner’s solution:
    - Self-prediction, but
      - we have to be alert, sophisticated detectives
      - doesn’t account for a novel plan
      - it doesn’t address the problem(!)
- Ryle’s version (can we use dispositions) ‘Le Penseur’:
  - he isn’t doing anything publically observable and
  - nothing follows what he’s doing

- Ryle’s solution (MM, p. 75):
  - ‘as-if’ mutterings (that aren’t ghostly or symbolic)
  - sleeping analogy
    - why bother with the pretending when thinking?
    - how do you explain non-moving pretending?
Trouble 3: Productivity

Noam Chomsky (‘the’ linguist): 1956 Review of Skinner’s ‘Verbal Behavior’

Argued that the productivity of language cannot be explained by behaviourists.

Behaviourist explanation of language was essentially statistical

Couldn’t explain

- novel grammaticality
- ambiguity
- embedded clauses

One of the main events in the ‘cognitive revolution’ of the 60s
The legacy

Many aspects of behaviorist methodology:

- scientific, materialist approach
- behaviour as main measure of mental function
- Internal processes like ‘imagery’ were not taken seriously until the 1970s.
- studying ‘consciousness’ is only now scientifically respectable
- New movements in philosophy and psychology, like dynamicism, continue espouse behaviorist methods