

Humans, Animals and Machines

Exploring the philosophy of mind

ESSAY 1: CAN BEHAVIOURISM EXPLAIN THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BODY AND MIND?

A person, who is undergoing an examination, observes that his or her hands are shaking and feels his or her heart beating harder than usual. This person concludes that he or she is in a state of stress by observing his or her physical signals. However, he or she does not describe oneself as conscious or unconscious of this state. The person deduces a mental and physical state by objective observation of his or her behavioural. This example questions us about the nature of mental and physical states.

The body in philosophy is the material constitution of a living being, or its physical dimension. It is in space and time while being subject to the mechanical laws of the frame of reference in which it finds itself. Uniformity and similarities between all the bodies can be seen by external observation. Whereas the mind, sometimes to be dissociated from the brain, refers mainly to an immaterial substance invisible to the outside world. It is often associated with consciousness. Several philosophical currents have tried to define and understand living beings. This may lead to considering body and mind as one fundamental substance for understanding. However, sometimes there are philosophical currents that oppose or reject one of the two substances in order to define living beings.

At the end of the 19th century, a psychological and philosophical current emerged, that of behaviourism. Philosophical behaviourism, in particular, translates into an objective analysis focused on the external behaviour of humans and animals, rejecting internal experience. This means that a being reacts to his or her environment without calling on the confidentiality of sensory data. In this respect, the mind does not represent an entity but a function. According to the philosopher Gilbert Ryle, the mind is a person's tendencies and abilities to do certain things. It is therefore important to underline that in philosophical behaviourism there is not a single substance, which would be our body envelope, but that there is the body and intellectual performances which are the functioning of the mind.

This leads us to wonder about: can behaviourism explain the relationships between body and mind? To answer this problem, I will try to demonstrate how behaviourism puts intellectual performance at the service of behaviour. Then I will highlight certain phenomena which call into question the behaviourist vision of the relationship between mind and body.

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As seen above, mind and body have a precise definition, and are dissociated from each other but are in permanent communication. In behaviourism, the mind loses its transcendence as in dualism, and we speak more about intellectual performance. Indeed, intellectual performance is the idea of a behavioural disposition, or family of behavioural tendencies, evident in the way a person behaves in one situation rather than another. Intellectual performance is therefore the result of behaviour.

Behaviour is made up of stimuli, i.e. an observable object or event that triggers observable reactionary manifestations of the organism. For example, belief is more commonly described as a state of mind that admits the truth or reality of something. But are we constantly believing? One may ask whether belief is a fixed and constant state or a momentary state. When we practise an activity we do not think about the substance we believe in since our attention and gaze is focused on our gestures in order to carry out this activity. This does not make us appear in a state of belief. One could say that we characterise ourselves as believers when we are, for example, praying, or talking about the substance we believe in. And other people can also characterise us as believers when they see us or hear us believing in that substance. So we can ask ourselves whether belief, instead of being in a state of mind, would not rather be found when a person characterises himself or herself by what he or she could do in particular

situations or environmental interactions. We could therefore say that behaviour defines what we are in our own and others' eyes more than our mental states. This is what behaviourism supports.

However, the word belief has a semantics more related to the mind, as an immaterial and dominant substance, rather than to behavioural characteristics. So does language demonstrate a truth that contradicts behaviourism, or is it a habit of language that leads to confusion? In order to talk about behaviourism and to be in line with this trend, mental terms should not be used. To avoid this, one should either invent new words purely associated with behaviour, translate mental terms into behavioural terms or paraphrase them. A habit of using language that is only descriptive of behaviour would lead to much greater clarity since there would no longer be a confidential individualisation of the mind which is not always comprehensible to everyone. There would be a much better understanding of the relationship between body and mental performance. There would be more difficulty in assessing the degree of desire or pain, which are sensations unique to each person.

Finally, concerning the relationship between body and mind seen in a behaviourism way, i.e. intellectual performances, we can see an empirical dominance in this current. If we do not possess a consciousness that leads us to shape ourselves through innate abilities, it is because we acquire skills through customs, repetition and learning, just like animals. Indeed, Olds and Milner's experiment in the 1950s demonstrated through repetition and a system of rewards that the mouse tested behaved as if it had understood how the mechanism of the experiment worked. The behaviour of the mouse demonstrates that it gains skills and relates its body to its mind, as intellectual performance.

Through this part we were able to understand the definition of body and mind in behaviourism, as well as the clarity between the two substances that language implies in this current and finally the obvious empiricism. Through these three elements of analysis, we can understand how behaviourism emits a relationship where the mind is at the service of behaviour. However, certain phenomena of the mind seem to be unexplained by this philosophical current.

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So far, we have been able to understand how behaviourism explains the relationship between body and mind, i.e. the body is the means of defining itself by reacting with its environment and the mind is a function that accompanies behaviour but in which there is no confidentiality. However, in certain phenomena, a contrast can be observed between behaviour and the mental state in which we find ourselves.

The first phenomenon we can question is sleep and mainly dreaming. Indeed, you have probably woken up without remembering having dreamed. There is therefore a logical parallel between the body and intellectual performance, since the body is inactive or at rest, the brain is just as much so. This means that in this case the behaviourist explanation of the relationship between body and mind is acceptable.

However, it becomes blurred when a person wakes up remembering having dreamt. Dreams can be understood as a series of images, representations that cross the mind, with the characteristic of an illusory consciousness such that one is aware of one's dream, without being aware that one is dreaming. Here the fact of remembering one's dream may not be understood as a counter-example to behaviourism, since this current admits memory faculties as intellectual performances. On the contrary, the fact of dreaming is hardly admitted and definable in this current since this phenomenon belongs to the confidentiality of the mind which does not interact with the body. So

according to behaviourism we could say that we are asleep because our eyes are closed, but this would not explain the phenomenon of dreaming, which is different from sleep. Although sometimes we do bodily actions in connection with the events that take place in our dreams. We can ask ourselves if it is not the mind which sometimes during the dream interferes with the body, we could therefore see a superiority of the mind over the body. But this is not possible in behaviourism.

It is understandable, through this example of dreaming, that behaviourism can explain what is commonly known as voluntary consciousness, such as bringing an umbrella with you since it is assumed that it is raining outside. Although this type of explanation may seem like a vicious circle since bringing an umbrella implies that one wishes not to get wet, which implies or presupposes that one believes that the umbrella can protect us from the rain. Thus, the analysis of belief presupposes desire, and conversely, the analysis of desire presupposes belief, even though belief besides being a mental state is also behavioural. But what is inexplicable by behaviourism is involuntary consciousness. For example, we don't want to dream, and yet we dream, we end up having thoughts that follow on from one another without having wanted to.

Behaviourism can therefore admit a phenomenon of voluntary thoughts, as this is regularly verified by behaviour, but behaviourism cannot explain involuntary ideas, which sometimes have no effect on behaviour. If there are voluntary ideas, however, are there involuntary behaviours and does this call behaviourism into question?

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Behaviourism is based on the acquisition of knowledge and behaviour, which corresponds to an empirical vision. This means that one is not born with knowledge. It refutes any inheritance during the evolution of the species. However, in moments of panic, such as a fire, we have learned to follow a precise protocol in order to leave the place. But when we are trapped for the first time in a burning place and are left to our own devices, we cannot make use of the knowledge we have acquired on a daily basis as this situation requires new skills. Moreover, we notice that thinking in a moment of panic is no longer as clear-cut as in normal times.

All this leads us to a behaviour that seems to act on its own. This is in line with the current of behaviourism, since the body interacts with its environment without appealing to an interiority. But how, in a situation in which we have never yet assimilated a typical behaviour, can our body behave on its own? We observe, here, an involuntary behaviour which questions empiricism and consequently the basis of the acquisition of behaviour in behaviourism.

In this example, where we are stuck in a burning place, we appeal to the survival instinct. However, this phenomenon is not acquired, it seems to be present in spite of us and has always been present. This leads us to have an involuntary behaviour that seems to respond to something eminent and innate. In this case, we notice that behaviourism can have difficulties in explaining certain nativist phenomena associated with the mind, which leads to involuntary behaviour. If certain phenomena, such as mental states and involuntary behaviour, explain with difficulty the relationship between intellectual performance and the body in behaviourism, is there a correlation between the limits of the body and the mind according to Science and Physics.

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If we follow the behaviourist thesis according to which behaviour can be explained without reference to inner non-behavioural and mental activity, this indicates that our entire being follows the mechanical and biological laws of the frame of reference in which we find ourselves. To be more precise, as a consequence the body and the intellectual performances follow in parallel the same evolution in space and time. This means that as a child, which is the period when we are most alert and our body changes the most rapidly, our intellectual performance should also be more alert. This may correspond to the acquisition of language, for example. Indeed, in children we speak of a "radical explosion" when we can observe an almost unlimited capacity to understand and produce sentences that they have never heard before.

However, if we reproduce the same pattern when the body ages, it becomes more enigmatic. Old age can be described as purely physical, through the appearance of body mechanisms such as ageing skin or weakened muscles. But this phenomenon can also be associated with a mental state, such as when we think our memory is less efficient. However, our ability to make choices does not change. Achieving a result through reasoning does not change either. Eating chocolate, if you are a chocolate lover, remains just as spontaneous as when you were little. So if intellectual performance is at the service of behaviour, that they are also both material and belong to the same frame of reference, how is it possible that all our intellectual performance does not follow the slowing down of our behaviour during ageing?

We can therefore affirm that in behaviourism the mind is not understood as an immaterial substance but as a brain with neuronal connections, generating intellectual performance. The latter imply behaviours, which in turn relate to brain activity. However, intellectual performance and perceptions are not entirely in accordance with mechanical laws. Behaviourism cannot therefore explain the entire relationship between behaviour and the brain, for example time and its perception. Indeed, it is faster to anticipate a movement than to produce it, so there are two time spaces here, that of the body and that of the mind.

In conclusion, behaviourism is the notion that a person is in a certain state of mind, and therefore is willing to behave in a way that is characteristic of that state of mind. To be more accurate, the mind has less meaning and influence in shaping oneself. We can see in behaviourism a scientific view of the relationship between body and mind. Indeed, it has been observed that this current is related to evidence that can be explained by observations of external and material facts. This is why the mind is rather seen as the intellectual performance of the brain. It would be at the service of the body and would allow self-understanding. Indeed, we find in this current a desire for clarity in what living beings are. This is why behaviourists focus on behaviour through an empirical approach to its explanation as well as the use of a language that only writes what is explainable and material. Through the use of rationality, this makes it possible to alleviate the torments of the human being, such as the possession of a spirit which would be immaterial and whose only limit would be the limits of the body. This is why behaviourism denies all involuntary behaviours and thoughts in order to avoid any metaphysical position such as the dualism of substances.

Behaviourism explains the relationship between body and mind in a rational, and perhaps reductive, way, focusing on behaviour and considering the mind rather as the brain with intellectual performance.