

Inner Life

by

U. T. Place

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1. Introduction

The widespread occurrence of the view that mental life is located within the human body is noted, and the question is raised whether and, if so, to what extent mental life can be said to be located within the body in a literal spatial sense.

2. The inner location of the mental in the idiom of ordinary discourse.

Idioms in ordinary language which assign or appear to assign a location to the mental within the body of the individual concerned are distinguished as follows:

- (i) The idiom whereby bodily sensations are assigned locations in various parts of the body,
e.g. 'headache', 'toothache', 'backache', 'heartburn', 'stomachache', 'stomach cramp', and others assigning pains, aches, smarts, itches, throbbings, and tinglings to different parts of the body.
- (ii) Idioms whereby mental processes and activities other than sensations are assigned a location in some part of the body,
e.g. 'doing calculations in one's head', 'racking one's brains', 'feeling' or 'knowing something in one's heart' or 'heart of hearts', 'having' or 'experiencing a tune running through one's head', 'having' or 'seeing spots before the eyes', 'having' or 'hearing a singing' or 'ringing in the ears'.
- (iii) Idioms whereby organs or parts of the body are construed as the source of mental capacities and propensities,
e.g. 'brainless', 'heartless', 'spineless', 'gutless', 'using one's brains', 'being guided by the head', or 'heart', 'coming from the heart', 'gut reactions'.
- (iv) Idioms in which aspects of mental life are assigned a location within the mind,
e.g. 'having' or 'bearing something in mind', 'having it in mind to do something', 'having certain thoughts running through one's mind'.
- (v) Idioms in which aspects of mental life are assigned a location within an organ or faculty of mind,
e.g. 'picturing' or 'seeing something in the mind's eye', 'committing something to memory', 'searching one's memory for something'.

3. The inner location of the mental as a metaphor.

The contention that the idiom of inner location in our ordinary mental talk are all metaphorical and not, therefore, to be understood as implying literal spatial location within the body is examined in the light of the suggested criteria whereby metaphorical idioms may be distinguished from expressions which are intended to be taken literally. By the first criterion a predicate is metaphorical, if a simile, formed by adding to the expression a phrase such as 'like', 'as if', or 'as it were', can be substituted

for it without change or loss of meaning. By the second criterion a predicate is metaphorical if some of the entailments which are characteristic of the standard case, where the expression is being used literally, do not apply. It is argued that all the idioms of mental inner location mentioned in the previous section are metaphorical by both criteria. Nevertheless a distinction needs to be drawn between functional metaphors or analogical predicates (to use the terminology of Aquinas), where there is no convenient alternative to the metaphorical expression, and redundant or pleonastic metaphors (metaphorical predicates proper in the terminology of Aquinas) where the metaphorical expression can be replaced by a non-metaphorical expression without loss or change of meaning. In terms of this distinction only the idiom of the location of bodily sensations and the idioms in which calculation is done and tunes run 'in the head' are found to be functional or analogical. The remainder are found to be redundant and, hence, mere turns of phrase.

4. Mental Inner Location and Mind/Brain Identity.

The finding that the idioms of mental inner location in ordinary discourse are all, in one sense or another, metaphorical, is not inconsistent with the thesis that the mind or some part of it is a state or process in the brain. For although the talk about minds has its origin in ordinary discourse, the fact that ordinary language does not assign any literal spatial location to the mental is not inconsistent with the view that the states and occurrences which are described in ordinary language in terms of the mental idiom are as a matter of contingent fact states and processes with a literal location in the brain. On the other hand to hold that some of the idioms of inner mental location are to be understood literally would be inconsistent with the mind/brain identity thesis, since they assign to mental processes and capacities a location within body that is not in the brain, and one thing cannot literally be in two places at once.

5. The Cartesian doctrine that the mind is neither extended nor located in space.

Many philosophers since Descartes have held that there is some kind of logical contradiction involved in any literal application of spatial concepts to the mental. The best known passage in which Descartes argues for this view occurs in the Sixth Meditation. However since there are things as geographical points which are not extended in space, but are nevertheless spatially located, he needs a separate argument to show that the mind is not spatially located. An argument against the spatial location of the mind is to be found in a letter written to Princess Elizabeth in 1643. The argument against the spatial location of the mental contained in this letter is rather obscure. What Descartes seems to be saying is that the mind cannot be spatially located, because it can conceive of things (presumably universals like triangles in geometry) which have no spatial location in space, whereas material substances are always spatially located and no two of them can occupy the same location. All that follows from this argument is that particular spatially located material substances are not the only things of which the mind can conceive. The conclusion that the mind is not spatially located, does not follow from the fact that some of the things of which it conceives are not spatially located.

Descartes' arguments against the application of the concept of spatial extension to the mind are equally unconvincing. His first argument, to the effect that mind is not divisible in the way that spatially extended things are divisible because nothing can be subtracted from the mind when a limb is amputated from the body, rests on the assumption that if the mind is to be thought of as extended it must be thought of as extended uniformly throughout the body. However if, as seems more probable, its extension is confined to a part of the brain, only a removal of a part of the brain tissue involved would be expected to produce a subtraction from the mind: as indeed it does. His second argument is that mind cannot be carved up into its separate faculties in the way that a spatially extended material object can be carved up. What this argument shows is that the mind is not an extended substance, ignoring the alternative possibility that it is not a substance at all, but a process like the circulation of the blood, which is spatially extended and located, but which, like the mind, cannot be carved up into physically separable bits.

6. A metaphysical argument for the spatial location of mental processes and against the spatial location of mental states.

Although Descartes' arguments fail to convince, they draw our attention to the fact that there are some kinds of things, which cannot be conceived to exist without being spatially located, e.g. particular or primary substances in Aristotle's sense, and other things, e.g. universals, and particular relations between things, to which concept of spatial location has no application. It is argued that processes, though they cannot be conceived as occurring independently of the matter or substance in which or to which they happen, are like substances in that it always makes sense to ask of a process where it is taking place. On the other hand it makes no sense to ask where a dispositional property like the brittleness of glass, the flexibility of rubber or the horse power of a car is. This one of the arguments in favour of Ryle's hypothetical analysis of dispositional properties and against the view of Geach and Armstrong which holds that dispositional properties are to be identified with 'categorical states' of the substances which have the properties in question. Such internal categorical states undoubtedly exist and are discoverable by scientists but they are not the same thing as the dispositional properties which they serve to explain. The categorical states are spatially locatable; the dispositional properties whose existence they explain are not.

It is concluded that whether or not and to what extent mental life is spatially located depends upon the sort of thing mental life may be supposed to be. If and in so far as the mind is a substance it must be spatially located. Mental life must also be located if and in so far as it is a process. If on the other hand it consists of a relation, such as the alleged relation of intentionality connecting the mind to its objects, it cannot be spatially located. Nor, if I am right, can it be spatially located if and in so far it consists in a set of dispositional properties.

Reasons are given for rejecting both the view that the mind is a substance and the view that mentality consists in the intentional relation. It is argued that mental life is a complex system of processes, instantaneous events, continuous states and dispositional properties and hence that that part or aspect which consists of mental processes must be spatially locatable, and that that part which consists of dispositional properties is necessarily not so locatable.

7. Inner Location as an explanation of the privacy of mental processes.

The wide spread employment of the idiom of inner location in our ordinary mental talk raises the question as to what feature or features of mental life makes the use of this metaphor appropriate. The feature in question is presumably what has been referred to as the 'privacy' of mental life. It is suggested that the privacy of mental life consists in its being (a) covert or hidden from immediate observation by others (b) known to the individual concerned in a way that is more immediate and direct than it can ever be to any one else. It is argued that a satisfactory account can be given of the features in so far as they apply to mental dispositions, such as being intelligent, knowing, believing, understanding, wanting and intending, in terms of hypothetical analysis of dispositional properties proposed by Ryle; but that no such account will work for mental processes, which involve a continuous sequence of changes which can persist in spite of total muscular paralysis. It is submitted that no satisfactory account can be given of the inability of an external observer to detect such changes, which are in some sense continually witnessed by the individual himself, without supposing that they are changes which are hidden from view because they are going on under his skin and, hence, almost certainly inside his skull.