

[Place, U. T. (1979). Review of K. V. Wilkes, *Physicalism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978. *Philosophy*, 54(209), 423-425.]

*Physicalism*. By K.V.WILKES. *Studies in Philosophical Psychology*. Edited by R.F.Holland (Routledge & Kegan Paul. London and Henley. Price £4.75 net)

This book purports to provide us with a solution to the mind-body problem. That it fails to achieve this objective can be predicted *a priori* not just from a comparison of its length with the sheer complexity of the problem, but from the observation that there is in fact no one problem to which the description 'the mind-body problem' uniquely applies.

Dr Wilkes does indeed partly recognise this multiplicity of different problems in the distinction she draws between 'the ontological issue' concerning the relation between mental and physical events states and processes and 'the cosmological issue' of the relation between mental and physical concepts in the explanation of behaviour. Nevertheless in the opening paragraph of her book, she adopts a series of manoeuvres whose effect is to progressively narrow the focus of discussion to suit her own preconceptions. She begins by defining the mind-body problem as a problem concerning the relationship between "mind and body" rather than between "*the* mind and *the* body". She then proceeds to substitute for the relationship between mind and body, the relationship between "what are normally taken to be, on the one hand, mental and, on the other hand, physical events, states and processes". Finally in the passage where she defines the scope of what she takes to be the "relatively unproblematic" term 'physical' as "picking out all and only the items, processes, concepts, laws, hypotheses, theories or theoretical postulates used essentially by physical scientists", she performs two remarkable sleights of hand in the course of a single sentence. On the one hand she moves almost imperceptibly from talking *de re* about mental and physical events, states and processes to talking *de dicto* about the concepts, laws, hypotheses, theories and theoretical postulates used by physical scientists, thus enabling her to end up over the page talking about the relationship between mental and physical concepts in addition to the relationship between mental and physical events, states and processes. At the same time she slips in a definition of 'the physical' which enables her to present the mind-body problem as one which arises exclusively in the context of the doctrine which she calls 'physicalism' according to which everything in the universe is to be described and explained for scientific purposes "in purely physical terms". By this I take her to mean that all genuinely scientific explanations are to be couched in terms of concepts and theories which either are or are reducible to those employed by physicists when on duty and when talking about the phenomena within their sphere of competence rather than about their own intellectual activity in studying those phenomena.

Viewing the mental through this particular brand of physicalist spectacles Dr Wilkes distinguishes two aspects of mentality which constitute a problem for her kind of physicalist. On the one hand there is the problem of the ontological status of what used to be called 'consciousness', but which Wilkes calls 'sentience'. Do we need to postulate a separate category of mental events, states and processes over and above the events, states and processes occurring simultaneously in the brain in order to accommodate those events, states and processes of whose occurrence in his own case their owner has privileged and incorrigible knowledge? On the other hand there is the cosmological problem of incorporating into a physicalist account of human nature the 'intensionality' which, as she rightly points out, is a feature of some, but not all, mental concepts, particularly those, such as the concepts of 'belief' and 'desire', which are constantly employed in our common sense explanations of human behaviour. Not that the physicalist is required to provide a translation of all the concepts of common sense psychology. For such common sense explanations do not match up to the exacting standards which a physicalist requires of a scientific explanation. Nevertheless a scientific psychology which conforms to these rigorous

standards must account for those features of human behaviour to which the intensionality of our common sense explanations draws attention.

Dr Wilkes claims that both these problems can be effectively resolved or rather dissolved by adopting the principle of 'psycho-physiological functionalism' with "a touch of Eliminative Materialism" added in for good measure. Psycho-physiological functionalism is a programme for the integration of 'scientific psychology' with neurophysiology to form a unified science of psycho-physiology with a theoretical framework provided by the kind of schematic analysis of the brain as a goal-directed functional system which she elaborates in Chapter 4. This may dissolve the mind-body problem as it arises for the kind of physicalism she advocates; but one is left wondering whether all scientific theory construction in the biological sciences, let alone in psychology, can and, if it can, why it must be forced into this physicalist straight jacket. Certainly the mind-body problem is not exhausted by its implications for this particular view of what constitutes respectable science.