

U. T. Place as a Behaviourist

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Abstract- U. T. Place is rightly called the forerunners of Physicalism or Identity Theory of Mind. But he also claims himself to be a behaviourist. Like the behaviourist he believed that mental events can be elucidated purely in terms of hypothetical propositions about behaviour. These can also be elucidated by the reports of the first person's experiences. He has many arguments in favour of behaviourism for which he is called a behaviourist. In this article I shall give a glimpse of behaviourism, particularly of logical behaviourism and then explain the circumstances under which Place is called a behaviourist.

Index Terms- Mind, Brain, Behaviour, Consciousness, Dispositions, Physicalism.

I. BEHAVIOURIST ANALYSIS OF MIND

In the history of philosophy the theory of behaviourism occupies an important place in narrating the nature of mind. This theory is called by Armstrong a sophisticated form of the theory of mind. According to this theory, there is nothing called mind which is occult or private. This theory does not believe the existence of mind apart from the behaviour of the body. This theory holds that in terms of physical behaviour or tendencies to behave in human body all mental states and processes can be accounted. All the mental processes are represented through behaviour and therefore the only means for investigation of mental processes or psychological processes of a person is his behaviour. This theory holds that physical conditions of the body and its interaction with the environment determine the behaviour of a person. Thus in unfolding the nature of mental concepts this theory emphasised on the importance of disposition.

Moreover this theory does not accept any unobservable stimuli rather it focuses solely on observable stimuli, responses and its consequences. This theory holds that behaviour of a person can be observed and at the same time verified by other persons and it is for this reason they define consciousness in terms of bodily behaviour.

This behaviouristic explanation is of different types, such as Methodological, Psychological and Logical. But here I shall discuss the logical behaviourism only because this theory is important in philosophy.

II. LOGICAL BEHAVIOURISM

The logical behaviourism is advocated by Gilbert Ryle (1949) and later Wittgenstein (1953). The development of Ryle's logical behaviourism is based on the criticism of Descartes' theory of dualism. In explaining mind Ryle uses the term behaviour, skills, tendencies, propensities, dispositions,

inclinations etc. He does not believe that mind is something occult, mysterious, other worldly, something private or spiritual. Ryle in his book *The Concept of Mind* writes, "Dispositional words like "now", "believe", "aspire", "cleaver" and "humorous" are determinable dispositional words. They signify abilities, tendencies or pronenesses to do, not things of one unique kind, but things of lots of different kinds".¹

According to Logical behaviourism all statements about mental phenomena can be translated into a set of hypothetical statements about behaviour. Here the term 'translatability' does not mean presently existing behaviour but can be translated into a set of statements about that person's actual and possible behaviour. Logical behaviourism deals with the meaning of mental terms or concepts within the sphere of philosophy. By mental states it means behavioural dispositions or tendencies.

L. Wittgenstein, another logical behaviourist also develops his theory by criticising Descartes' dualism. Wittgenstein does not believe that mental states are there in the mind. For him, it is mental activities for which mind stands not for mental entities. He says that to understand the inner processes of a person outward criterion is needed.

III. U. T. PLACE AS A BEHAVIOURIST

It is well known to all that U.T. Place is a fore runner of Physicalism according to which mental states and processes and brain states and processes are identical. But in addition to this he is also a contributor to the theory of Behaviourism. He paid his respects to Ryle, Wittgenstein and Skinner who inspired him in developing behavioural theory. Admitting himself to be a behaviourist, Place writes in his article 'From Mystical Experience to Biological Consciousness: A Pilgrim's progress'.

"One consequence of studying psychology alongside philosophy at a time when Ryle, Austin, Grice, and Strawson were creating Oxford ordinary language philosophy was that the acknowledged behaviourism of Ryle and the unacknowledged behaviourism of Wittgenstein, which I learned about from the then newly appointed Wilde Reader in Mental Philosophy at Oxford, Brain Farrell, was to awaken an interest, also fostered by Farrell, in the neo-behaviourism of Tolman, Hull, and Skinner whose different formulations were then the focus of theoretical debate within psychology, not so much in Britain as in the United States. It was through this that I became, as I remain to this day, a behaviourist".²

1 G. Ryle (1949), *The Concept of Mind*, p-114

2 U.T Place, (2004) *Identifying the Mind*, P-27

There are ample reasons for which Place can be considered as a behaviourist.

(1) He subscribes to the idea that study of private experiences of the individual is possible only through the objective records of what he says when he is asked to narrate them. It is because of the fact that words are anchored to what is observable publicly and for which linguistic communication is possible.

(2) Place believes that we can describe and explain the behaviours of others through our ordinary psychological language. But this does not do very well in describing our own private experience. And all these are due to the fact that words are anchored to what is publicly observable and for which linguistic communication is possible.

(3) Place says that we can explain and describe the publicly observable behaviour of others through ordinary language and this is the primary function of ordinary language. But as a theoretical language it is unsuitable for scientific psychology. Thus Place supports the attempt of the behaviourist who extended their effort to construct an alternative to ordinary language for scientific purposes.

(4) He also believes that in case of both human and animal, our ordinary psychological language is the source of important insight which controls behaviour. By the use of the technique of conceptual analysis, which is developed by Wittgenstein and other ordinary language philosophers, these insights can only be extracted.

(5) Place further maintains that an integral and vital part of the causal mechanism in the brain is the phenomenon of conscious experience. These conscious experience controls the interaction between the organism and its environment by the process of transforming input into output, stimulus into response. Thus only in the light of the distinctive function it performs in that process of input and output transformation, its peculiar properties can be understood.

But in spite of all these Place at the same time believes the existence of conscious experience and the possibility of its scientific study. According to him, to deny the existence of conscious experience is to abandon everything that he has stood for. He declares himself as a behaviourist but does not admit the identification of dispositions with central states, although he believed that dispositions of behavioural sort causally depend upon the brain. Disagreeing with behaviourists, he said that mental processes are just processes in the brain but whereas dispositional mental states are not states of the brain. This view was given towards the end of his life.

Once it was believed that mental events are a separate class of events which cannot be described in terms of the concepts employed by the physical sciences. But this kind of belief is not above the question and as such now-a-days it has no universal acceptance among philosophers and scientists.

In his famous article "Is Consciousness A Brain Process" (1956) Place boldly stated that unlike the materialism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the modern Physicalism is behaviouristic. On this view consciousness is treated either as a special type of behaviour, or disposition to behave in a certain way.

The logical behaviourist's analysis of cognitive and volitional concepts in terms of disposition was accepted by Place.

He emphatically stated that an analysis in terms of dispositions to behave is fundamentally sound in case of cognitive concepts like 'knowing', 'believing', 'understanding', and 'remembering'. The same is also true in case of volitional concepts like 'wanting' and 'intending'. But he believes that there are some sorts of mental concepts which he calls 'intractable residue of concepts' clustering around the notions of consciousness, experience, sensation and mental imagery in case of which no behaviouristic account would suffice. Although these mental concepts cannot be analysed in terms of dispositional verb, Place expresses his firm conviction that ultimately a satisfactory behaviouristic account in case of these mental concepts will be found. He admits that there are certain statements that refer to some events and processes that have some sort of private or internal experience. These are really private to the individual of whom they are attributed. He cites statements of such cases about pains and twinge, about how things look, sound and feel, to speak metaphorically about things dreamed of or pictured in mind's eye. But he apprehends that one may infer that making this assumption leads him to an inevitable dualist position. Dualists believe that over and above the physical and physiological processes there is a separate category of processes. This category is formed by sensation and mental images. They also believe that mental state possesses an ontological reality and there is a correlation between these two categories. But Place firmly believes that one who accepts the separate category of inner processes is not a dualist. According to him, there is no logical ground by which one can dismiss the thesis that consciousness is a process in the brain.

But although Place believes that consciousness is a process in the brain, he is not in favour of the thesis that to describe our dreams, fantasies and sensation is to talk about a process in our brain. He extends his view that 'cognition statements' are analysable into statements about behaviour. But he does not claim that in the same way statements about sensation and mental images are reducible to or analysable into statements about behaviour. It is clearly false to say that statements about consciousness are statements about brain processes.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the above analysis it is clear that although Place is one of the advocates of Physicalism, he has much contribution in the development of behaviourism. He agrees with behaviourism in many respects. Although he believes that some sorts of mental concepts such as, the notions of consciousness, experience, sensation and mental imagery, which he believes inner process, cannot be explained by the theory of behaviourism yet he has firm conviction that ultimately a satisfactory behaviouristic account will be able to explain these concepts. He was so inclined towards behaviourism that he even admitted that modern Physicalism is behaviouristic in character.

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