

The (Perennial?) Contemporary Relevance of Ryle

TCD Public Lecture

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Plan for Lecture

- Cartesian Versus Rylean Conceptions of “Mind”
- Ryle’s Scientific Vision
- (Brief) Riposte to Empirical Objection

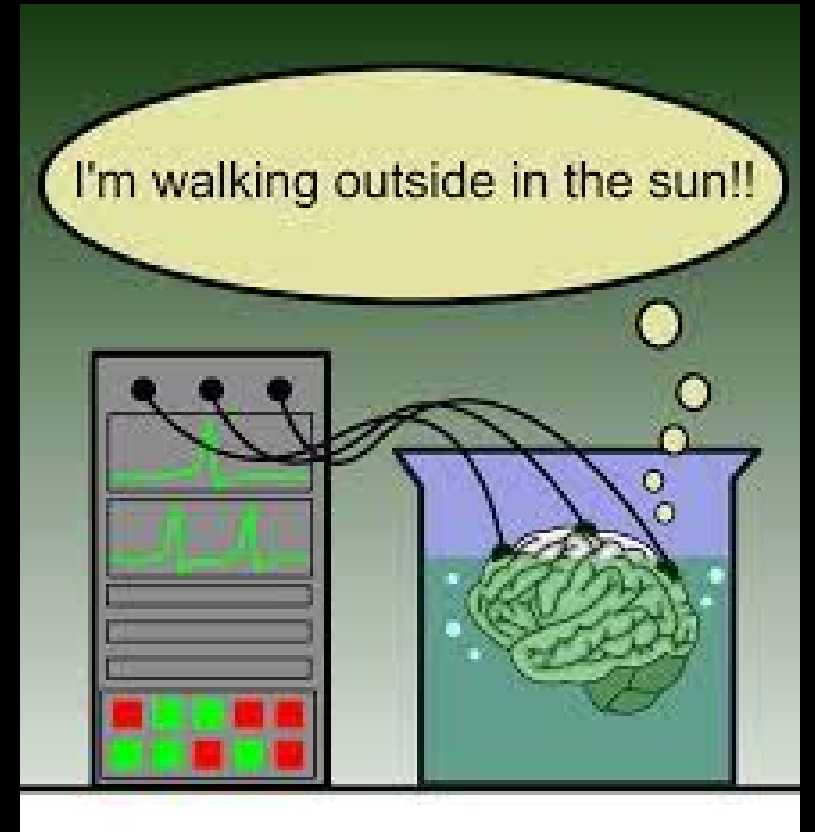
Cartesian Versus Rylean Conceptions of Mind

Descartes' "Mind"



Descartes' "Mind" (cont.)

- Mind is *internal, subjective, private...*
- Physical is *external, objective, public...*
- The internal/subjective/private mind *represents* the external/objective/public world.



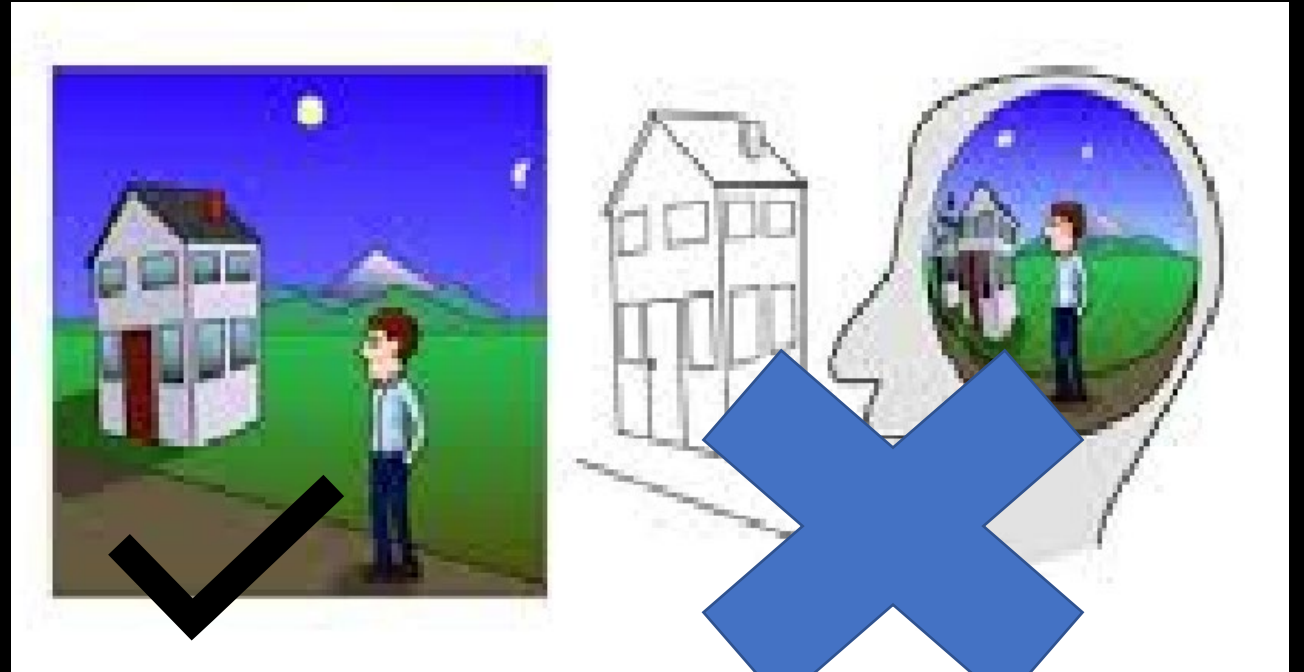
Ryle: Descartes' View is Ridiculous!

- Descartes *invented* a view of mind which brought into being a host of problems (mind-body problem, extreme solipsism and scepticism, etc).
- By looking to how we ordinarily speak we can *dissolve* these problems (*ordinary-language-philosophy*); there is no mind-body problem, we can successfully engage in inter-subjective communication about our mental states, possess knowledge of the 'external' world, and so on.

Ryle's "Mind"

- Minded concepts are dispositional in nature. They refer to (counter-f)actual behaviour.
- Behaviour— or *activity*, as I prefer— is wholly public and inter-subjectively accessible.
- ~'Internal' minds *represent* 'external' world; rather, minded beings directly interact with their environments.

Ryle's "Mind"



A Note on Ryle's *A Priori* Method

- Early-to-mid 20th century philosophers made use of an *ideal language* to clarify and thereafter resolve philosophical problems.
- *Ordinary-Language Philosophy* took said method to create philosophical problems by abstracting language from its everyday context; respecting the everyday context and use of language would lead to a dissolution of philosophical problems.
- **TL;DR:** Ryle sat back in his armchair, smoked his pipe, and just thought about how people talk and what that tells us.

Ryle's Scientific Vision

Case One: Consciousness



- Most cognitive scientists agree with the Cartesian tenet that we are, quite literally, brains in vats.
- In explaining how *unconscious representation* gives rise to *conscious experience*, they face a Cartesian Theatre difficulty (and their only way out is to deny the reality of 'what it is like' to experience).

Case One: Consciousness (cont.)

- *Enactive-Ecological Thesis*: brains enable embodied activity, and embodied agent-environment interactions constitute consciousness (consciousness is a skilful, non-representational engagement with the world).
- No Cartesian Theatre, no spooky subjective properties, no otherworldly or otherwise mysterious posits; consciousness, like all other physical phenomena, a dispositional system and its various mysteries are dissolved. How Rylean!

Case Two: Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- *Ryle's Regress*: if 'internal' mental acts (representations) cause 'external' behaviours, then intelligent action could never occur. This is because all intelligent 'internal' mental acts would themselves have to be intelligently executed, and so a prior intelligent act must occur, which in turn must be preceded by a further prior intelligent act...
- *Frame Problem in AI*: impossible to representationally capture and encode all relevant information, with Buridan's ass situations ensuing; an existence proof of Ryle's Regress.

Case Two: Artificial Intelligence (cont).

(H/T Andrew Wilson!)



Case Two: Artificial Intelligence (cont.)



- *Situated Robotics*: non-representational, embodied architectures mimic minded activity much better (as Ryle foresaw!).
- (Again, H/T Andrew Wilson!)

Case Three: Surely Representation Plays Some Role?

- Fair enough, it might be that embodied activity is largely non-representational. But what of the fact that representational knowledge— derived from books, say, or verbal instruction— does help people get better/interact more skilfully with their environments?
- Ryle granted this, but he thought it merely a scaffold to becoming an expert; experts don't follow representational rules, only non-experts do.

Case Three: Surely Representation Plays Some Role? (con.)

- Dreyfus model of skill acquisition: learners move through stages of proficiency, and discard representational strategies as they improve.
- Empirically vindicates Ryle's precise understanding of skill and skill learning.



Brief Riposte to Empirical Objection

- Like it or loathe it, the empirical *indispensability* of representation in contemporary cognitive science demonstrates that minds are representational.
- But (h/t Hutto & Myin, 2013):
 - *Don't Need Representation* (situated robotics, ecological psychology, not doing requisite theoretical work)
 - *Can't Have Representation* (recalcitrant to naturalisation).

Wrap-Up

- Ryle had a priori, armchair concerns with the Cartesian vision of mind (also dreamt up from the armchair); he proffered an alternative, a priori vision of mind which dissolved all the Cartesian issues.
- Though lacking a single ‘scientific bone in his body’, Ryle was remarkably prescient about empirical matters.
- Given the human proclivity to think in Cartesian terms, Ryle’s philosophy of mind will likely have perennial significance!