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WITTGENSTEIN'S ARGUMENT ON THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM AND THE ESSENCE OF MIND

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Abstract

Ludwig Wittgenstein's unique construct of the philosophy of language has been one of the greatest theories among the realm of logical empiricism. Despite the fundamental contributions Wittgenstein's has made to the later post-modernist philosophy and the contemporary discussion on the relationship between algorithmic design and human-driven discourses, Wittgenstein's philosophical construct has greatly influenced the philosophy of mind, modern contemporary science, and of course, the classical philosophical topic of the mind-body problem.

Keywords: *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Cognitive Science, Philosophy of Mind, Tractatus, Mind-body Problem*

Wittgenstein's Argument on the Mind-body Problem and the Essence of Mind

Wittgenstein's approach toward the Mind-body Problem, the constant topic of debate that lasted for thousands of years, wasn't anything similar to the responses of other philosophers. Instead of dissecting the hypothetical "spiritual" construct of a person and argue for the relation and interaction between the substances, Wittgenstein rejected the nature of the question and argued that essence of the mistake was the misuse of language, arguing that "a large class of cases of the employment of the word 'meaning'—though not for all – this word can be explained in this way: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Philosophical Investigations (PI), 4th edition, 2009) (PI 43) Instead, Wittgenstein believed the essence of

the problem to be about the differentiation of the language of mind. Wittgenstein's notion has in fact inspired later reductive approaches toward mind, but is of course often put into question.

Wittgenstein's Rejection to the Mind-body Problem

Wittgenstein rejected the classical formulation of the Mind-Body problem by challenging the assumptions that underlie it. The classical Mind-Body problem concerns the relationship between mental states or experiences (the mind) and physical states (the body), meaning that the problem often revolves around the question of how mental states, such as thoughts, emotions, and consciousness, relate or interact to physical processes in the brain and body. Philosophers

who engage with this problem typically fall into two camps: dualists, who posit a fundamental distinction between mental and physical substances, and materialists/physicalists, who seek to explain mental phenomena solely in terms of physical processes.

In term of rejection, Wittgenstein contends that the traditional formulation of the problem arises from philosophical confusion and misuse of language. Instead of attempting to resolve the Mind-Body problem in the traditional philosophical sense, Wittgenstein suggests that we should examine the ways in which language is used, and how different language games shape our understanding of mental and physical phenomena.

The Misuse of Language

To understand what Wittgenstein means when he argues the Mind-body problem to be a misuse of language, we must understand his concept of “language game”.

Wittgenstein’s concept of “language game” is a central idea elaborated in his work *Philosophical Investigations*. It serves as a way to challenge traditional views of language, meaning, and philosophical problems. A “language game” refers to a specific social context or practical activity in which language is used and understood. Each language game has its own set of rules, conventions, and criteria for meaningful communication. He stresses that when we ignore the context of the words used, we are bound to import an outside requirement and thus perform linguistic exchanges even without noticing, causing people to deviate an expression or consequent understandings. Meanings behind one’s diction cannot be independent of the context, “As if the meaning were an aura the word brings along with it and retains in every kind of use” (*Philosophical Investigations* (PI), 4th edition, 2009) (PI 117)

In fact, through examples of “language game” in daily conversations we would be able to see how the issue is homologous in the traditional discussion of the Mind-body problem. A casual example of language game is when people give directions: in the language game of giving directions, the meaning of phrases like “Turn left at the next intersection” is determined by the context of guiding someone to a specific location. These

phrases would be meaningless if taken out of this context. Another could be when people name objects for a child: they establish a language game in which the child learns to associate words with objects. The meaning of the words is learned through the repeated interaction with the objects and the accompanying language.

We can re-examine the dualist account of the mind-body problem in retrospection, taking Descartes’s dualism for an example. As Descartes claim that the “spirit” and the body is separable (Descartes, R., 1641) (*Meditation VI*), in what context is the “spirit” named as a concept? As Descartes phrases himself that the “spirit” is an immaterial context, in what perceivable context was it established?

Wittgenstein’s philosophy further questions the dualist account as it seems to violate the universal nature of philosophy. It is an approved common conception that good philosophical series ought to be precise, and even if the subject of discussion is an “unsayable” proposition, i.e. the essence of an object we cannot describe, it still should meet this criteria. Wittgenstein was explicit in his method of meeting the criteria, arguing that even if “things... cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical” (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP), 1922, C.K. Ogden) (TLP 6.522). In simpler terms, Wittgenstein ridicules the dualist account by suggesting that the discussion of the “unsayable” should be shown rather than said.

Entities, Activities, and Subjects

For Wittgenstein, what could resolve the Mind-body problem fundamentally is the differentiation of these related but distinct linguistic concepts: entities, activities, and subjects.

As the mind-body problem centers on the elucidating relationship between the mind and the body, Wittgenstein believes that reframing the issue on the distinction of some linguistic concepts is how the problem could be resolved as it arises essentially due to the misuse of language (*The Blue and Brown Books* (BB), 1958).

Wittgenstein introduces the concepts of entities, activities, and subjects as pivotal elements in his analysis of language and meaning.

Entities refer to objects, things, or elements that can be identified, described, or pointed to. In Wittgenstein's philosophy, entities are often associated with the objects in the world that language refers to. These can range from concrete physical objects like chairs and trees to abstract concepts like numbers or emotions. Wittgenstein acknowledges that our language is built upon our ability to refer to entities, but he emphasizes that the meaning of these entities is deeply tied to the specific language games in which they are used. The meaning of an entity is not inherent in the entity itself; rather, it is derived from how it functions within various language games and contexts.

Entities, to Wittgenstein, are objects, things, or elements that can be identified, described, or pointed to. In his philosophy, entities are often associated with the objects in the world that language refers to, ranging from concrete physical objects like chairs and trees to abstract concepts like numbers or emotions. Wittgenstein acknowledges that our language is built upon our ability to refer to entities, but he emphasizes that the meaning of these entities is directly tied to the specific language games in which they are used. The meaning of an entity is not inherent in the entity itself; rather, it is derived from how it functions within various language games and contexts.

Activities encompass various actions, practices, and behaviors that humans engage in. Wittgenstein's notion of activities highlights the dynamic nature of language and meaning. Activities involve not just the use of words but also the broader context in which they are employed. For example, the activity of giving directions involves more than just the words spoken; it includes gestures, shared understandings, and the contexts of navigation. The meaning of language emerges from the interactions between words and the activities they are a part of.

Subjects refer to individuals who use language, engage in activities, and interact with entities. Subjects are not just passive recipients of meaning but active participants in the process of creating and understanding meaning. Wittgenstein's emphasis on subjects highlights the role of perspective and context in shaping our understanding of language and the world.

The differentiation of these interrelated concepts brings us to an untraditional understanding of the mind-body problem. Wittgenstein argues that by understanding the interplay of entities, activities, and subjects within different language games, perplexity of the mind-body problem will be dissolved. He does not seek to provide a definitive solution in the sense of traditional metaphysical inquiry; rather, he aims to clarify the nature of the problem by revealing its linguistic origins.

In short, Wittgenstein's approach to the mind-body problem shifts the focus from metaphysical speculation to linguistic analysis. What matters to Wittgenstein when confronting the mind-body problem is to understand different languages of mind, but not to explore what or how they interact (Philosophical Investigations, 1953, G. E. M. Anscombe and R. Rhees (eds.)).

Wittgenstein's Differentiation of Languages of Mind

Wittgenstein introduced several concepts in his exploration of language and its relation to our understanding of the mind and the physical world. Concepts as "Description of Mind," "Report of Brain Processes," and "Generic Report of Processes," are part his attempt to dissect the intricacies of language in terms of depicting mental processes. Understanding the language of mind is Wittgenstein's approach toward the mind-body problem (Stern, D. G. (1995).

Description of Mind

A "description of mind" addresses the intricacies and limitations inherent in attempting to convey the nature of mental states through language. Wittgenstein contends that the attempt to provide an exhaustive description of mental experiences, such as thoughts, emotions, or consciousness, faces fundamental difficulties due to the uniqueness of each individual's internal states. His insight is that language inherently struggles to accurately capture the private and subjective nature of these experiences, making it challenging to convey them to others in a comprehensive and universally comprehensible manner.

A description of mind could take place as one is expressing their miserable mood. They could tell their friends how they feel over-

whelmed by pressure of tremendous amount of unfinished task and constant state of fatigue. They could explain how they feel unsatisfied about the present, reminisce the past, and feel unsettling about the future. These specific experiences, put into words, is what Wittgenstein calls a description of mind.

Report of Brain Process

The notion of a “Report of brain processes” pertains to the endeavor of mental phenomena by referencing underlying neurological processes. Wittgenstein examines the potential reduction of mental experiences to physical processes and highlights the complexities of such attempts. Wittgenstein’s perspective underscores the challenges of mapping subjective experiences onto objective physiological processes, and he cautions against overgeneralizing or oversimplifying these translations.

To clarify, a report of brain process does not fall into Wittgenstein’s “unsayable” realm but should be considered as a form of reaction. A prominent example of such is shriek or yell when experiencing pain: the shriek is our reaction toward the stimulus of external influence, a commanded action that the brain distributes to our body parts to report to other that we are undergoing a certain physical process. The fact that normal people have the same bodily structure and the same sensory systems, we perform the same behavior to express that we are undergoing the same process.

Generic Report of Process

The concept of a “Generic report of process” addresses the broader endeavor of communicating about processes in a general and non-specific manner. Wittgenstein argues that language often allows us to convey information about processes without fully specifying the intricate details or unique attributes of those processes. This concept highlights the versatility of language, which can serve as a tool for expressing general patterns and characteristics without providing exhaustive accounts of individual instances.

Generic reports of processes are almost everywhere in our daily discourses, for instance, a person instructing his friend to bake a cake, that is, while the description is not exhaustive and doesn’t capture all the poten-

tial variations and nuances of baking a cake, it serves the purpose of conveying a general understanding of the process. The language used in the report allows for flexibility and adaptability, making it suitable for conveying the process in a variety of contexts.

To summarize, Wittgenstein’s specified distinction of the “description of mind,” “report of brain processes,” and “generic report of process” in his later stages of work has refined his notion in the *Tractatus*, challenging the assumptions that language can effortlessly encapsulate the richness of mental experiences or that it can straightforwardly bridge the gap between the mental and the physical. By delving into these concepts, Wittgenstein reveals the intricacies of language and its role in our philosophical discussions about the mind and its relationship to the body (Philosophical Investigations (PI), 4th edition, 2009).

Later Reductive Supports: Mind and Psychology

Implications of Wittgenstein’s unconventional approach to the philosophy of mind has affected many later studies of this branch. Specifically, Wittgenstein is believed to be one of the earliest influencers to the development of contemporary psychology and neuroscience, as they all attempt to reduce all sensations to physical brain processes.

Specifically, British philosopher J.J.C Smart has developed a theory of the philosophy of mind based on Wittgenstein’s approach.

Sensations and Brain Processes by J. J. C Smart

In the 1959 philosophical review, Smart developed a consequent theory of mind-body relation and personal identity based on Wittgenstein’s account.

Holding the identical central claim that sensations are physical brain processes, Smart further clarified Wittgenstein’s distinction of “generic report of process” and “report of brain process”, that is, sensations are considered as a “report of (something) process”, and that the “brain process” is only a kind of “report of (something) process” (Smart, J.J.C., 1959).

To clarify, Smart is not arguing that sensations are spatial-temporally continuous or

overlapping but is saying that sensations are identical with brain processes.

Smart's theory has greatly supported Wittgenstein's construct of his philosophy of mind.

His argument employs the concept of necessary co-implication to support his view. He argues that mental states and brain processes necessarily co-implicate each other: wherever there is a mental state, there is a corresponding brain process, and vice versa. This mutual dependency reinforces Smart's position that mental states are reducible to brain processes, eliminating the need for an immaterial mind distinct from the physical body.

Based on their similar approach of mental states and physical processes, Smart's work can be seen as a departure from dualistic metaphysical explanations. By reducing mental states to brain processes, Smart offers a physicalist account that avoids invoking separate immaterial entities.

Smart's approach in fact does resonate with Wittgenstein's reliance on specific language games. Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis encourages an examination of how terms are used in various language games. Similarly, Smart's materialism centers on the idea that mental terms find their grounding in physical processes. Both approaches aim to ground philosophical inquiry in a specific framework rather than engaging in abstract speculation.

Specifically, Smart's reply to some objections has strengthened his support to Wittgenstein. Some scholars argue that ignorance and false beliefs disconnects sensations and brain processes, reasoning that since false belief and ignorance about sensations did not affect the ability to make true statements, there is no necessary identical relationship between sensations and brain processes. However, Smart replied, when A is identical to B, one may know A only but have no clue about B, for instance, one can talk about lightning without any knowledge about electricity ('On Some Criticisms of a Physicalist Theory of Colour', 1975). Thus, Smart has again illustrated how understanding and differentiating the language of the mind is a more efficient approach toward the relation between the mind and the body.

In summary, like Smart, these later reductive approaches draw on Wittgenstein's skep-

ticism about abstract definitions and his emphasis on grounding philosophical inquiry in specific linguistic contexts. While Wittgenstein did not provide a specific reductive theory himself, his philosophical method has encouraged subsequent philosophers to adopt more nuanced and contextualized perspectives when addressing the mind-body relationship.

Objections to Wittgenstein's Notion of Mind-body Problem

Wittgenstein's linguistic interpretation toward the mind-body relation is of course, facing many challenges, namely from the physicalist approach toward the issue. The physicalist approach to the mind-body problem stands in contrast to Wittgenstein's perspective, particularly with regard to Wittgenstein's dismissal of the concept of "qualia."

Physicalist Account: Frank Jackson's *Epiphenomenal Qualia*

Frank Jackson's position, rooted in the conviction that mental states are ultimately reducible to physical states (Furash, G., 1989), offers a critique of Wittgenstein's disregard for qualia, asserting that such an approach fails to account for the experiential richness inherent in consciousness and the limitations it imposes on a solely linguistic analysis of the mind-body relationship.

Jackson challenges Wittgenstein's perspective by asserting that the concept of qualia plays a pivotal role in unraveling the nature of consciousness and the mind-body relationship. He contends that Wittgenstein's dismissal of qualia as private experiences neglects their fundamental significance in the discussion of consciousness. Jackson's argument, exemplified through the Mary thought experiment, underscores that qualia possess a distinctive experiential quality that cannot be wholly captured by linguistic descriptions or reduced to mere physical facts.

In the thought experiment, we are introduced to Mary, a neuroscientist who has an thorough understanding of the neurophysiological processes underlying color perception. Mary lives in a black-and-white environment where she has been secluded from experiencing color her entire life. Despite her comprehensive knowledge of the physical aspects of color vision, she has never personally

encountered color. The important moment is when Mary is eventually released from her monochromatic environment and exposed to the full spectrum of colors for the first time (Fürst, M., 2011).

The key question posed by the experiment is: Does Mary learn something new upon experiencing color for the first time, even though she had complete knowledge of the physical processes associated with color perception before the experience?

Jackson believes that the concept of qualia is necessary in the interpretation of Mary's experience. Factually speaking, Mary knows the exact neurophysiological processes, the wavelengths of light, the neural responses, and all relevant scientific information about how color perception occurs in the human brain. Upon stepping outside the room and experiencing color for the first time, Mary has a new, subjective experience that goes beyond her existing knowledge. She now knows what it's like to see colors firsthand, which she could not have learned from her previous purely intellectual understanding.

For Jackson, Mary's new experience of color reveals something about consciousness that cannot be fully explained or anticipated based solely on physical knowledge. This "something" is what Jackson refers to as "qualia" – the subjective, intrinsic qualities of conscious experiences. Qualia encompass the raw feel or the phenomenal aspects of experiences, which are not reducible to physical descriptions.

The essence of Jackson's critique is in his assertion that Wittgenstein's approach leaves unaddressed the central issue of subjective experience and its irreducibility. He suggests that Wittgenstein's focus on linguistic limitations does not adequately grapple with the profound nature of conscious experience. By isolating qualia from the realm of linguistic communication, Wittgenstein's approach inadvertently sidesteps the very aspect of consciousness that poses a challenge to the reductionist tendencies of physicalism.

What we could generalize, on a broader level, is that we should question whether the mind, or what we call thought, could really be reduced to anything else. In alliance with Jackson's rebuttal, it is prominent that Wittgenstein's approach of reducing thought pro-

cesses and sensations into brain processes, which is essentially materialistic, is a problematic understanding toward the mind-body problem.

In short, Frank Jackson's physicalist approach to the mind-body problem offers a critique of Wittgenstein's stance on the mind. Jackson's argument revolves around the contention that qualia hold a central role in understanding consciousness and challenging strict physicalism. While Wittgenstein's focus on linguistic limitations aims to resolve philosophical confusion, Jackson's position emphasizes the necessity of accounting for the experiential richness inherent in qualia and their implications for the nature of conscious experience.

Conclusion

To conclude, Wittgenstein dismisses the conventional framing of the mind-body problem, which posits the mind and the body as distinct substances or entities that interact in some manner. Instead of engaging in metaphysical speculation about the nature of these entities, he directs his attention towards the language we use to discuss mental and physical phenomena. He contends that much of the confusion surrounding the mind-body problem is a result of linguistic misunderstandings and conceptual confusions.

Central to his approach is the examination of the different language games associated with talking about the mind and the body. Language games are distinct and context-dependent forms of language use that have their own rules and purposes.

Wittgenstein's influence on later studies of the mind-body problem is significant. His emphasis on the analysis of language and its connection to philosophical problems has inspired many philosophers and researchers to explore the linguistic and conceptual foundations of various philosophical dilemmas. Later philosophers as J.J.C. Smart has developed and refined a new theory of the philosophy of mind based on the Wittgenstein's assumption that sensations are physical brain processes. Albeit the theory's uniqueness, physicalists as Frank Jackson has successfully pointed out the deficiency of the theory, emphasizing the significant of qualia in interpreting one's subjective experience.

In short, Wittgenstein's treatment of the mind-body problem deviates from traditional metaphysical inquiries by concentrating on the linguistic and conceptual aspects of the issue.

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