

Mind and Language- A Wittgensteinian View

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Abstract

The idea of mind or mind related concepts are thought to be something private or mysterious. Mind is often thought to be different from body. This sort of view leads us to the famous mind-body problem. Rene Descartes' Dualism in the 17th century is one of the major schools of thought that tried to determine the mind-body problem. He regarded mind to be distinct from body and can exist apart from the body. However, in the philosophy of Wittgenstein, such an idea is rejected as grammatical mistake. Wittgenstein does not regard mind to be something mysterious and separate from the body. Mind only has its place in language. It is grammatical mistake to regard mind to be real. We need to see our grammar while using the word "mind" or mind related concepts.

Keywords: Mind, Language, Private Language, Grammar, Privacy

Introduction

The conception of the mind is studied in a branch of philosophy called 'Philosophy of Mind'. It is that branch in which the nature of the mind, mental events and mental functions, mental properties, consciousness, and their relationships to the physical body, particularly the brain. The philosophy of mind is an enormous part of analytic philosophy that deals not only with a single problem but quite a host of inter-related issues and concerns. These issues and concerns have turn into so numerous and complex that the many philosophers now regarded philosophy of mind as a separate and most important philosophical area in its own right.

A very good approach to this huge subject is to inquire whether mind is a physical (material), non-physical, or neither. In trying to give an answer to the question, we often arrive at a problem which is the famous "mind- body problem".

Rene Descartes' Dualism in the 17th century is one of the major schools of thought that tried to determine the mind-body problem. In the philosophy of mind, dualism is regarded to believe that mental phenomena are in some respect non-physical or that the mind and body are not identical. Thus, it come across a set of views about the relationship between mind and

body and is contrasted with other position such as physicalism, in the mind-body problem.

Rejection of Cartesian view of mind:

Wittgenstein has rejected the traditional conception of mind. He did not regard mind to be mysterious or private like Descartes. To accept the privacy of mind is to accept private language. Such a view goes against the view of a language which is practiced in a social setting. Wittgenstein believes that speaking of a language involves a form of life which belongs to a social reality and to accept privacy of mind goes against this view.

If we look into Descartes' dualism, we find that mind is a non-physical substance. He clearly identified the mind with consciousness and self-awareness. He also believes that mind is something different and also distinguished it from the brain. The brain is regarded to be the seat of intelligence which is very different from mind. It was Descartes who was known to be the first philosopher to formulate the mind- body problem in the form in which it exists today. Descartes regarded mind and body to be separate entities, and hence can exist without each other. He also believes that mind can also exist without bodies. It can exist when bodies perished in death. Mind is regarded by him to be immortal. However, there is a great deal of controversy regarding his

belief that mind could exist without bodies. But still Descartes was firm with his view that mind were immortal, that they continue to exist as disembodied minds after the body perished in death.

However, there are various difficulties which are related to dualism and this led the analytical philosophers to doubt whether dualism is viable theory at all. For this reason, many philosophers have chosen different alternatives. The most profoundly subscribed alternatives have all been physicalistic. They are behaviorism, identity theory, functionalism etc.

WITTGENSTEINIAN MIND:

In the philosophy of Wittgenstein, we get a very different idea of mind as compared to Descartes. Wittgenstein did not give a clear idea of mind. He never directly spoke about mind. However, from his different thoughts and writing his view of mind can be taken into consideration. Mind, according to him, is not an entity as it has been held by Descartes. It is not something inner or private or subjective. For Wittgenstein, it is grammatical mistake. We are to see grammar of the word mind in the same sense that how the word 'mind' or mind related concepts are used in language. Wittgenstein argues that the philosophical understanding of the nature of mind does not require the denial or affirmation of the language game involving mind. Mind is real in the sense we are already playing the language game involving mind. However, it is not the case that the language game brings mind into existence.

MIND AND BEHAVIOUR:

Wittgenstein believes in mental predicates, however, he rejected the Cartesian concept of mind. He also has not maintained the Cartesian distinction between the mind and the body, according to which, mind is a private entity which exist even after the demise of the body. Wittgenstein regarded human behaviour as something which provide necessary criterion for mental predicates. His view of mind can be figured out through his quotation,

“An inner process stands in need of outer criteria”¹

Wittgenstein means that the inner process can be explain through the overt behaviour. The inner

process, which he means by sensations like pain, stands in need of the outward criteria or overt behaviour. Wittgenstein has denied mind as something hidden or private that can be known only by the possessor of mind but not by other, it is something mysterious. However, though Wittgenstein denies the existence of mind as an entity yet he must not to be taken as behaviourist. He does not reduce mind or mental states to behaviour or modes of behaviour. According to him, mental processes need outward criteria in order to be identified as such. The outward behaviour connected with pain in the sense that mental state of pain or feeling of pain, are connected with the behaviour of the person who is having pain. Pain behaviour is necessarily connected with pain. Natural expressions of pain like crying, moaning etc are necessarily connected with the sensation of pain. These natural expressions of pain are replaced by behaviour of pain which is a conventional behaviour of pain. As when one says, “I am having pain in my knees” is not a statement but avowals. According to Wittgenstein, if these have been the natural expressions of pain then the word pain would not have been there in language.

PRIVACY AND SENSATION:

According to Cartesian view, there is a fundamental ontological duality between a physical world and a mental world when we look into our experiences and objects. The physical world is regarded to be made up of matter. It consists of objects which exist in space and time. They interact with each other in physical processes and events. On the other hand, the mental world is thought to be distinct from the outer world. It is something like an inner world. It consists of self impression, imaginations, sensations, moods, feelings, wish etc. For Wittgenstein, “if we succumb to this philosophical picture of the mental as a world, we will be prone to populate it with others, states events and processes, only immaterial or ethereal”²

Moreover, it is also regarded that the physical world belongs to a public realm and can be perceived by everyone. The objects of the physical world have independent existence. They can also be owned, shared by different owner, or also exist unowned. However, the object of

mental world cannot exist apart from an owner, they are essentially owned. A 'pain', 'mood' or 'wish' cannot exist independently without an owner. A sensation is therefore impossible to exist without a sentient being. It is also held that a person's inner world is metaphysically his private world. It cannot be shared or transferred to any other being.

It is argued that if the inner world is a private world, then it is supposed that only the owner has privileged access to it and can know the processes, objects and states which it consists. Then there must be a certainty in the inner world. It must be a transparent world to its owner because one cannot doubt that one has sense impressions or a particular feeling and so on.

Wittgenstein tried to demystify the mind and also tried to avoid the Cartesian concept. According to Wittgenstein, mind is not something inner (in the sense hidden) or subjective. The concept of the something inner arises because we misuse the grammar of our language where we talk about the mental processes and activities. Wittgenstein wrote,

"In what sense are my sensations private? Well only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it....."³

Wittgenstein raises one question regarding the privacy of sensations. He asks a question "in what sense are my sensations private?"-

1. Because only I know whether I am in pain
2. Because another person cannot know my pain, he can only surmise it.

Wittgenstein holds that in one way it is false and in another way it is nonsense. According to him, in our day to day life when we use the word 'know' we always contrast it with the words 'doubt', 'believe' etc. we use the word 'know' only in case where no doubt is possible. Since regarding the occurrence of sensations, feeling etc in one's own case, one cannot have any doubt, therefore it logically implies that one cannot use the word 'know' regarding one's sensation like pain, itches etc. Since others can sometimes doubt regarding whether I am in pain, therefore, when others have no doubt that I am in pain he can say that "I know he is in pain". According to Wittgenstein, Cartesian view that "I know that I am in pain" is wrong because I can never doubt whether I am in pain. Since I can never doubt that

whether "I am in pain", therefore it logically follows that I can never say "I know that I am in pain". All I can say meaningfully is 'I have pain', or 'I am in pain'. He raises the question regarding the Cartesian view regarding the essential privacy of sensations. He tries to show that the Cartesian view that 'only from one's own case' one knows how to use the sensation words like pain, itches etc is nonsensical. For Wittgenstein, the sensation words like 'pain', 'itch', etc. are connected with some primitive natural expressions of pain and these sensation words are used in their place. When a child has hurt himself and cries (as the child cannot use the word pain) the adult talks to him and says, "Is it paining? It will be alright after some time". From this the child learns that the sensation he is having is called 'pain'. 'Crying', 'moaning' etc are natural behaviour of pain and these natural behaviour of pain are nothing but exclamations which are later replaced by sentences like "I am in pain", "it is paining" etc. the adult teaches the child exclamations like 'pain' and later on these exclamations are replaced by sensation words such as when someone says, 'I am in pain' it is not a statement of report but actually a pain behaviour.

Thus, for Wittgenstein, Cartesian view was not acceptable. According to him, one of the main factors for the misconception of mental and physical world to be distinct lies in the idea that sensations are essentially private to the owner therefore another person cannot have my experience, "you cannot have my headache" or "You cannot feel my anger". They belong to the inner object of its owner's world. Two people can have the same pain, for example, a throbbing headache in the temples. But it is supposed the pain cannot be identical. The pain can be exactly alike but not identical because it is logically impossible for one person to feel another person's pain. The pain must be numerically different but they can be qualitatively alike. They cannot be shared or transferred to any person other than its owner. Therefore every person has their own subjective world which is distinct from any other person.

Wittgenstein regarded this kind of arguments as different language being crossed. He stated that the expression, 'a pain in leg' has a quite a different grammar from 'a pin in the leg'. According to Wittgenstein, "you cannot perceive

pain in my leg cannot see the pin e.g., as indeed, you cannot see the pin in the closed pin-box, the pain is not in my leg is in the same sense. Even though you open up my leg, you will not find pain inside it. It cannot be extracted or removed (any more than can a cut in my leg), and although it can be made to go away by an analgesic, when it goes away, it does not go elsewhere". Therefore, it can be said that there is no exact location of pain neither pain has any shape. Thus, Wittgenstein believed that the criteria for the location of pain lies in the person's pointing the place or saying where he is having the sensation of pain. "It is the rule of grammar that a person's pain is where he indicates, avows, etc., not a truth of metaphysics that pains are in bodies. But the behavioral regularities which give point to our grammatical convention that a person's identification of the location of his pain is authoritative, that is, a criterion for the location of his pain, consist in the fact that he assuages his injured limb, clutches the part of his body that hurts, and so on.

However, a question may arise that 'Is having a pain a matter standing in a relationship to an object?' Wittgenstein states that feeling a pain is not a form of perception. To have a pain is to be in pain, it does not mean anything more than to suffer in pain. There is nothing to be own. Pain is a sensation and it cannot be own. According to Wittgenstein, it does not make any sense to wonder whether the pain belongs to me or to someone else. Two people with pain may suffer in exactly the same way but it makes no sense to say that the pains are numerically different or qualitatively similar.

PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT:

Wittgenstein tries to show that the mind is not a private entity. It is not something in which mental objects reside and can be known only through introspection. Wittgenstein has put forward the most celebrated private language argument in order to attack the traditional conception of the inner. The traditional concept goes back to Descartes, which he holds that the identity conditions of every sensation are purely introspective. Every individual knows their sensation word only through their own experience. A person knows 'pain' by his own experience. Sensations are individuated in a way that is entirely independent of any links of

external circumstances on behaviour. Sensation words get their meaning by introspection of own's own sensation therefore every person knows one's own sensation and not anyone else's sensation. However, Wittgenstein denies this view, he wrote;

"Such a language does not allow enough criteria for the meanings of its words and lack of such criteria results in that the words do not mean anything and can mean anything"⁴

The idea of essential privacy of sensation is an illusion. He persists private language argument and thereby rejects the whole idea that state of consciousness is essentially private There is a notion of private language in the sense that only the speaker can speak it, though the language could be taught to others in any of the various normal ways. We have of teaching a new language to someone who does not know it already example code language. Wittgenstein does not mean by private language, the code language. According to Wittgenstein,

"The individual words of this language refer to what can only be known by person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language"⁵.

Wittgenstein has put forward the most celebrated "Private Language Argument" in order to attack this traditional conception of Descartes, which he holds that the identity conditions of every sensation are purely introspective. Every individual knows their sensation word only through their own experience. A person knows 'pain' by his own experience. Sensations are individuated in a way that is entirely independent of any links of external circumstances of behaviour. Sensation words get their meaning by introspection of one's own sensation therefore every person knows one's own sensation and not anyone else.

Wittgenstein believes that private language fails to establish the genuine standard of correctness. In such language there is no question of correctness because whatever is right to me is right.

Wittgenstein has given an example where we are to suppose that someone keeps a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation and associate it with a sign S. whenever there is the sensation he writes down on the calendar every day. He speaks

or writes down the sensation and at the same time concentrates his attention inwardly. But how could he distinguish that sensation from other sensation; as he has no criterion for correctness. Whatever seems right to one is regarded to be right as it is non-accessible to others. This is the only mean and so we cannot talk about correctness. Wittgenstein states that it is not always possible to remember particular sensation and attending to the right sensation because memory often deceives us. Thus he states that it is better to get rid of private object as it is constantly changes as “your memory deceives you”.⁶

Wittgenstein came across the private language argument while discussing his idea of rule following. Wittgenstein tried to show that the idea of rule following only make sense to talk of following a rule in the context of practice- a behavioral regularity- informed by normative activities (e.g. as a standard of correctness, rectifying mistakes, justifying action by reference to a rule). According to Wittgenstein, such practices are learnt in social context although some may also be created for one’s private use. Language is learnt mostly from other speakers and is an important fact regarding the origin of linguistic ability. But it does not enter into the grammatical characterization of ability. Ability is always characterized by what it is an ability to do. According to Wittgenstein, the criteria for speaking do not require the production of a school or a parental certificate but it may be said as a practice which is done in a social setting. Wittgenstein does not aim to prove that rule following can only be possible in social group. But he believes that it is not possible to follow a rule privately.

Similarly, Wittgenstein also wanted to establish the point that one person alone independently of social setting and without previous training in a social group, could not talk of his own sensation and experiences. The view that different people cannot have identical sensation and that sensations are private is not accepted by Wittgenstein. It is not possible for a person to use a language to talk in solitude about his sensation unless he has acquired the language in a social setting. A language concerned with sensation is possible only if it is shared by a community. Wittgenstein’s main concern in this argument is

not that whether a person alone could or could not talk of his experiences in a language which is unsharable, but whether every person in a normal social setting can conceive to be following rules constituted by mental objects or private ostensive definitions. Private ostensive definitions, according to Wittgenstein, are like rules which are not accessible to other people. It is such rules which are the foundation of our common public language.

Thus, Wittgenstein does not regard the mind to be something mysterious. Whenever we talk of mind we claim of something which is inner. But, according to Wittgenstein, mind is not something hidden inside our body and contains objects like sensation which are private and inaccessible. He rejects the idea that one can know or learn sensation only from one’s own case or I can know or learn what pain is, I know only from my own case which is regarded to be essentially private. Wittgenstein argues against this view by introducing a famous analogy ‘the beetle in the box’. Wittgenstein wrote, “Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a “beetle.....”⁷

Wittgenstein asked us to suppose that everyone has box that only they can see into. No one can see into anyone else box. Each describes what he or she sees in the box as a ‘beetle’. I know what a beetle is from my own examination of what is in my box, you from yours. Wittgenstein points out that while we all talk about our beetles, there might be different things in everyone’s boxes, or perhaps nothing at all in some of them. The thing in the box could be changing all the time. Wittgenstein through this example tries to show that in our language game the thing inside the box is irrelevant. The thing inside the box has no part to play in our language game. Whatever it is, he maintains that it cannot have a part in the ‘language game’. Likewise, it is to say that one knows what ‘pain’ means from one’s own case which means in our language game of pain, the nature of sensation pain is irrelevant though we cannot feel another person’s pain and can never experience it yet like the word ‘beetle’ we play language game with the word ‘pain’. Wittgenstein tries to establish the point that even though we can never feel another person’s pain yet we can play language game with the word ‘pain’. What follows from this is that the

sensation of pain is irrelevant in our language game of pain. He does not deny the sensation pain but holds that the way we feel pain hardly matters in language game of pain.

The gist is that since private language is not possible, therefore, the idea of essentially private entity which one can know from one's own introspection is not at all meaningful

Conclusion

At the conclusion, it has to be pointed out that, Wittgenstein never tried to answer any question regarding mind or mind – body problem. His only motive is to clarify language. He tried to show that how misuse of language can entangle us into puzzlements. While doing so, he arrived into mind-body problem. Thus, Wittgenstein denied that there is any separate and a private substance called mind or thinking self. Though he does not denied mental predicates but he denied the idea of mind as a substance. According to him, mental predicates do not refer to any entity which is private and cannot be introspected. Mental states are nothing but particular patterns of behaviour. For Wittgenstein it is grammatical mistakes to hold mind is a private entity. It is only the word 'mind' which has its place in the language game which does imply that there is a real substance called mind.

Notes and References

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