Beyond Mental Representation: Dualism Revisited

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In this paper, I suggest that the perennial endeavour to understand how language and thought work leads to a major recurrent fallacy: the introduction of new entities/conceptual variables with misleading and elusive functions, apparently helpful, but in the event difficult, or indeed impossible, to grasp. It is obvious that the oft-quoted mental discomfort felt by Wittgenstein is due to this kind of counterfeit invention. And in the momentous complementary case of Wilfrid Sellars, it becomes conspicuous that we have no chance at all to find a satisfactory way to provide a synoptic view of commonsensical versus scientific descriptions of the world within the framework of a traditional dualistic and verbalist approach. In a desperate attempt to step out of this framework, i.e. to connect mental and physical processes, I will focus on the notion of motor activity, relying on conceptual metaphor theory and the enactive approach in cognitive studies.

1. Mental Discomfort

Wittgenstein's analysis of language makes obvious the anomalies we face in the traditional dualistic framework of philosophy. He believes that although language is very effective and useful in everyday life, it is capable of creating unsolvable puzzles in the realm of philosophy due to misleading analogies and its grammar. (Think of the well-known example of Wittgenstein, *viz*. the confusion in philosophy caused by the phrase "in the mind".) Wittgenstein speaks about gaps between rule and its application (Wittgenstein 1932/35, 90), thought and reality (Wittgenstein 30/32, 37), words and their meaning (Wittgenstein 30/32, 23), and words and things (Wittgenstein 30/32, 38). These issues touch upon the necessity of a meta-language. And this necessity leads to an infinite regress.

In *The Blue Book*, Wittgenstein calls attention to the hopelessness of the attempt to gain access to mental processes through language. Let me quote him at length.

> "I have been trying … to remove the temptation to think that there 'must be' what is called a mental process of thinking, hoping, wishing, believing, etc., independent of the process of expressing a thought, a hope, a wish, etc. And I want to give you the following rule of thumb: if you are puzzled about the nature of thought, belief, knowledge and the like, substitute for the thought the expression of the thought, etc. The difficulty which lies in this substitution, and at the same time the whole point of it, is this: the expression of belief, thought, etc., is just a sentence; – and the sentence has sense only as a member of a system of language; as one expression within a calculus." (41f.)

That is, it is not possible to solve the puzzle: mental processes are in conjunction with language and "[l]anguage is connected with reality by picturing it, but that connection cannot be made in language, explained by language". (Wittgenstein 30/32, 12) Thus we have no access to the states of affairs which are pictured by the sentences of language.

These gaps and puzzles, I suggest, derive from the traditional Cartesian dualism of the extended/physical and thinking/mental entities. There were many endeavours to overcome this split throughout the history of philosophy and it seems to me that Wittgenstein himself suffered from this duality. With the help of common sense experience (he believes explicating language works well in everyday discourse, emphasising the importance of usage) he hoped to be able to provide an alternative.

Wittgenstein's statement that "[t]he world we live in is the world of sense-data; but the world we talk about is the world of physical objects" (Wittgenstein 30/32, 82) clearly shows the tension between the mental and physical, though not in the accustomed manner, but rather in a special reversed order of the conceptual and the physical. Since "[s]ense-data are the source of our concepts" (Wittgenstein 30/32, 81), and we have pseudo-concepts (Wittgenstein 30/32, 12) (such as colour, primary colour, etc. which I suggest as being super-ordinate categories) as well, and at the same time we are engaged in different activities related to physical objects, we have no means to relate the mental and physical to each other. But as I will suggest, we do not live in the world of sense-data. Rather, we live in the world in an active and responsive manner. I believe that only in this way it is possible to overcome the traditional split.

William M. Ivins' views relate this split to language. As he writes, "it is impossible for us to go with words, for the ipseity, the particularity of the object, its this-and-no-otherness, cannot be communicated by the use of class names". (Ivins, 53) That is, concepts/words are class names, which means we use these words on the basis of similar features. Comparing words with objects, it is clear that "the object is a unity that cannot be broken into separate qualities without becoming merely a collection of abstractions that have only conceptual existence and no actuality." (Ivins, 63) At this point, it is undoubtedly clear that the world has been divided into two separate spheres: the world of actuality populated by objects, and the world of verbal symbols which are merely conceptual. Thus, if we do not reach beyond language, the traditional split remains.

2. Dualism Unresolved

The gaps/puzzles explicated by Sellars remained mostly un-resolvable because he has been devoted to verbalism, and thus to dualism. (In light of Ivins' considerations, verbalism and dualism belong together.) Sellars attempt to bridge the gap between privacy and intersubjectivity seems to be a successful enterprise, since he considers conceptual thinking as having a social character. That is, he tries to embed thinking in "common standards of correctness and relevance". (Sellars 1963a, 16f.) But his attempt to resolve the duality of the *manifest and scientific image of man* makes the difficulties arising from dualism clearly visible. In harmony with the idea that thinking is related to social intercourse, Sellars believes that the meaning of a word is not a kind of relation to entities, a kind of correspondence, but rather it is the *role* which the word plays in the given context. Accordingly, the dualism of the body and mind is indeed a dualism of two different ways in which we are related to the world. (Sellars 1963a, 11)

In the case of the *manifest and scientific image of man*, we find a *circulus vitiosus*: it is not possible to set order either in time (which is the primordial) or in function (which can be complete in itself). The endeavour of perennial philosophy provides continuity between them: it attempts to understand the structure of the former and at the same time to understand the achievements of the latter. (Sellars 1963a, 18f.) Beside this circularity, the main difficulty is "how an image of the world transcends in some way the individual thinkers" and moreover "how an image of the world, which, after all, is a way of thinking, can transcend the individual thinker which it influences". (Sellars 1963a. 14) To formulate this in a more pedestrian way: how is it possible that an image of the world has impact on the way people think while at the same time this image is under construction by them? A further difficulty arises from the fact that "e*x hypothesi* sensations are essential to the explanation of how we come to construct the 'appearance' which is the manifest world", which provides a certain homogeneity, and since "scientific image presents itself as a closed system of explanation … the explanation will be in terms of the constructs of neurophysiology, which … do not involve the ultimate homogeneity, the appearance of which in the manifest image is to be explained". (Sellars 1963a, 36)

There is a contrast between the concept that does not reach beyond "correlational techniques [which] can tell us about perceptible and introspectible events" and the concept that "postulates imperceptible objects and events for the purpose of explaining correlations among perceptibles". (Sellars 1963a, 19) Though the communal character of concepts, and the historical and communal character of the worldview along which we take the world into account, widen the horizon of the investigation, within the dualistic framework of verbalism there may arise the question of the ontological status of abstract and theoretical entities. Although Sellars is aware that "the problem of meaning is not only the problem of abstract entities, but the mind-body problem as well" (Sellars 1963b, 464), and he introduces the term *role* to escape the difficulties raised by correspondence, he could not offer a solution to resolve the duality of sensations and concepts, and thus, the different ways of sensation as dependent on the conceptual framework.

3. Motor Activity

I will conclude with an attempt to highlight how it is possible to reach beyond language and anchor concepts in the world of perceptible objects. In this manner, I hope to offer a solution to eliminate mental representation.

As opposed to traditional dualism, I am emphasizing rather the coupling of the body and mind on the basis of embeddedness. I suggest that conceptual thinking is deeply embedded in the perceiving and acting body, this active body is embedded in its physical environment, and both are embedded in a cultural milieu which limits our thought processes through its expressional means, limits our physical capabilities via its technical inventions, and determines the horizon of desires, aims, plans, etc. by customs and institutions.

Concentrating on the cognitive part of embeddedness, first, I will briefly recapitulate how cognitive metaphor theory relates conceptual processing to bodily experiences, then, relying on the notion of embodiment and the enactive approach, I will highlight the interconnectedness of perception, action, and their environment; finally, in conclusion, I will attempt to offer an alternative to mental representation.

The main idea of cognitive/conceptual metaphor theory is that "knowledge must be understood in terms of structures of embodied human understanding, as an interaction of a human organism with its environment". (Johnson 209) Embodied understanding is based on a conceptual system which is "'plugged into' our most relevant experiences very accurately at two levels": the *basic level* and the *image-schematic* level. (Johnson 208) The former is mostly based on kinaesthetic bodily experiences (using a chair requires a certain sequence of movements) and emerges in overall general forms; the latter "gives general form to our understanding in terms of structures such as *container, path, cycle, link, balance*, etc. This is the level that defines form itself, and allows us to make sense of the relations among diverse experiences". (*Ibid*.)

The enactive approach and the notion of embodiment treat perception and action as inseparable. As Valera *et al*. formulated, "the enactive approach consists of two points: (1) perception consists in perceptually guided action and (2) cognitive structures emerge from the recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided". (Valera *et al*., 173) Accordingly, "cognition … consists in the enactment or bringing forth of a world by a viable history of structural coupling". Structural coupling refers to intentionality, where intentionality is to be understood in the light of the possibilities of a given action and its fulfilment. (Valera *et al*., 205f.) A more recent approach by Alva Noë similarly suggests that "[t]o discover how things are, from how they appear, is to discover an order or pattern in their appearances. The process of perceiving, of finding out how things are, is a process of meeting the world; it is an activity of skilful exploration". (Noë, 164) Thanks to the enactive approach, the traditional input-output model of action and perception has changed and the environment/the world became an integrated part of human cognitive processes. Shaun Gallagher goes a bit further when he maintains that the boundary of the body and its environment vanishes in certain cases. His clarifying distinction of body image and body schema sheds light on the holistic nature of body schema. "I suggested", writes Gallagher, "that when body appears in consciousness, it normally appears as clearly differentiated from its environment. In experimental situations, body-image boundaries, for example, tend to be clearly defined. When I am immersed in experience, however, the limits of the body and environment are obscured. … [T]he body schema includes information that goes beyond the narrow boundaries defined by body image". (Gallagher 36f.)

As we can see, the enactive approach suggests we perceive the world in an active manner, and Gallagher thinks that moving in and acting upon the world presuppose unconscious functions in which there is no sharp boundary between the body and its environment. Both ideas provide ground for an attempt to eliminate mental representation. As Noë calls our attention, "it is not just clear … why an internal representation would be any better than access to the world itself. This harkens back to Wittgenstein's idea that anything a picture in the head could do could be done by a picture held in the hand. We go a step further: Why do we need a picture at all? The world is right there, after all. We are in *the world*." (Noë, 218f.)

To go one more step further: memory, the recollection of some impressions of the past, appears to challenge the enterprise to eliminate mental representation. But the results of research on picture viewing and picture description with the help of eye-tracking seems to prove that recalling an image is recalling the eye-movements previously related to the image. The experiments as Jana Holsanova described them suggest that "subjects visualize the spatial

configuration of the scene as a support for their description from memory. The effect we measured is strong. More than half of all picture elements mentioned had correct eye movements". (Holsanova, 252)

That is, recalling a picture is heavily based on eye-movements. Against the background of embeddedness and with the help of picture viewing and picture description combined with eye-tracking, we might hope to gain immediate access to the phenomena which earlier were called mental representation.

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