

A Philosophical Approach to the Concept of Motive in Gilvert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*

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Abstract

The concept of motive, in general is our reason for doing something that causes a person to act in a certain way or to do a certain thing, etc.. It is the goal or object of an action. The word 'motive' comes from the Latin words 'motivus', meaning moving, and 'movere', meaning to move. Motive means to think about the thing that moves us to act. We often hear of motive in the context of different kinds of actions. In any action, we can ask as what makes a person perform an action, what are the motives behind the performance of the action? The concept of motive can be defined as the psychological feature that arouses an organism to act towards a desired goal; the reason for the action that which gives purpose and direction to behaviour.

Professor Gilbert Ryle has extensively discussed the concept of motive in his book *The Concept of Mind* where he used the term 'motive' synonymously for the term 'inclination' like vanity, kindliness, avarice, patriotism, laziness, etc. He distinguishes between inclinations of this kind and feelings such as a throb of compassion, a glow of pride and a sinking sensation of despair. According to Ryle, when a man acts out of a certain motive then this is not to say that his action is preceded and caused by the occurrence of the corresponding feeling. He gives a positive account of what it is to act from a motive.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to enquire about Gilbert Ryle's concept of motive as found in his book *The Concept of Mind* and attempts to see whether his explanation about the concept of motive is satisfactory or not.

Keywords: Action, Dispositions, Emotion, Intention, Motive.

1.0 Introduction

The concept of motive, in general is our reasons for doing something that causes a person to act in a certain way or to do a certain thing, etc.. It is the goal

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or object of an action. The word 'motive' comes from the Latin words 'motivus', meaning moving, and 'movere', meaning to move. Motive means to think about the thing that moves us to act. We often hear of motive in the context of different kinds of actions. In any action, we can ask as what made the person perform the action; what are the motives behind the performance of the action? The concept of motive can be defined as the psychological feature that arouses an organism to act towards a desired goal; the reason for the action is that which gives purpose and direction to behaviour.

The concept of motive has a close connection with the concept of intention. However, sometimes a distinction can be drawn between these two. A man's intention is what he aims at or chooses, but his motive is what determines the aim or choice, and the term 'determines' is sometimes used synonymously for the word 'causes'. Generally, these two terms are not distinct in meaning. For example, in the phrase 'the motive of gain', 'gain' must be the intention and desire of the gain must be the motive. Motives have generally the form 'I wanted to ...', while intention has the form 'I did it in order to ...' yet, the meanings of the two forms are identical. When the motives of a man are good, it is not different from calling his intentions good.

There is a distinction between the meanings of motive and the meanings of intention. For example, if a man killed someone, he may be said to have done it out of love, pity or sometimes out of hatred. These factors can be expressed thus, in the forms 'to release him from his awful suffering' or 'to get rid of the swine' etc. All those expressions show the spirit out of which the person killed rather than a mere description of the result or end where the act of killing was only a means. This shows a distinction between the senses of motive and intention. Hence, 'motive for an action' has a rather wider and more diverse application than 'intention with which the action was done'.

2.0 Ryle's Discussion about the Concept of Motive in his Book *The Concept of Mind*

Professor Gilbert Ryle has extensively talked about motive in his book *The Concept of Mind* where he uses the term 'motive' synonymously for the term 'inclination' like vanity, kindness, avarice, patriotism, laziness, etc. He distinguishes between inclinations and feelings such as a throb of compassion, a

glow of pride and a sinking sensation of despair. According to Ryle, when a man acts out of a certain motive then his action is not preceded and caused by the occurrence of the corresponding feeling. He provides a positive account of what it is to act with a motive. He said:

[The statement "he boasted from vanity", ought, on one view, to be construed as saying that "he boasted and the cause of his boasting was the occurrence in him of a particular feeling or impulse of vanity.]

From another perspective, it is to be construed as saying:

[...he boasted on meeting the stranger and his doing so satisfied the law-like proposition that whenever he finds a chance of securing the admiration and envy of others, he does whatever he thinks will produce this admiration and envy] (Ryle, 1949).

Again, he states:

[To say that he did something from that motive is to say that this action, done in its particular circumstances, was just the sort of thing that that was an inclination to do. It is to say, 'he would do that] (Ryle, 1949).

Hence, he says that the concept of motive can be applied to a person if his intentions are known, it does not any matter whether he habitually acts with such an intention or not. Therefore, motives and intentions are closely connected; however, a sharp distinction can be made between them. When a reason for action refers to something prior to the action, it is a motive. However, when it refers to the future state of affairs brought about by one's action, it is an intention. An explanation of an action by an intention, in the form of 'what question', is an explanation of the term motive. According to Ryle, if a person is described as vain, considerate, avaricious, patriotic or indolent, then an explanation can be given regarding his actions, daydreams and thoughts in the way as he does. In such situations, vanity, kindness, avarice, patriotism and laziness are motives behind the performance of the actions. These motives are emotions that are the dispositions behind performance of the action.

These motive words are the character traits of a person. Whenever someone is described as a vain or indolent person, in such cases the words 'vain' and

'indolent' are referred as the character traits in the person itself. The person might be said to have vain from his childhood or indolent during his holiday period. According to Ryle, "His vanity and indolence are dispositional properties, which could be unpacked in such expressions as 'whenever situations of certain sorts have arisen, he has always or usually tried to make himself prominent' or 'whenever he was faced by an option between doing something difficult and not doing it, he shirked doing the difficult thing'" (Ryle, 1949). Ryle maintained that the motive words imply tendency or propensities that cannot imply any occurrence of feelings.

According to Ryle, in searching for one's motives as well as the motives of others, the process is same. A person can have a direct knowledge or direct appreciations of his own inclinations, where as he lacks that knowledge or appreciations in case of other's inclinations. The appreciations of one's own inclinations are unbiased and the person is not in a favourable position to compare his or her own actions and reactions with those of others. Apart from this person, an impartial and discerning spectator is the better judge of a person's prevailing motives, habits, abilities and weakness. This view seems to be in contrast with the view that an agent possesses a privileged access to the origin of one's own action. In virtue of such knowledge about one's action, the person himself or herself is able and bound to discover out of what kind of motives, he or she has a tendency to act on that particular occasion. Moreover, in such investigations, the person himself or herself mentions his or her motive or reason for pursuing the enquiry. Again, in case of every action where it is natural to ask 'from what motive was the action done?' it is quite possible that the action was not performed out of a motive but from one's habit. However, the performance of an action from a motive is different from its performance out of habit, yet the types of things, which belong to motives, also belong to habits. Both types of actions whether done from motives or habits are surely performed out of mind. To say that an action is performed from a force of habit is to say that there is a specific disposition which explains the action. Habits are not names of particular internal events or class of events. Hence, Ryle argues:

[To ask whether an action was done from force of habit or from kindness of heart is therefore to ask which of two specified dispositions the explanation of the action is.] (Anscombe, 1979).

Ryle maintains that it is appropriate to say that a certain motive is a character trait of a person. Character traits mean the person inclination to do certain types of things, make certain types of plans, indulge in some daydreaming and in certain situations to feel certain types of feelings etc. Hence, Ryle argues:

[...to say that he did something from that motive is to say that this action, done in its particular circumstances, was just the sort of thing that was an inclination to do. It is to say 'he would do that.'](Chappell, 1962).

3.0 Criteria of Motives being the Reason for Actions

Ryle talks about criteria of motives while talking about inclinations or motives. To explain an action done from a certain motive is not to connect it with an occult cause. It is to subsume the action owing to or deriving from a certain propensity or behavioural trend. This is not the only criteria for the motive of an action as there are some actions which are performed out of some habit, instinct or reflex. When a person acts out of some habit, then it means that the person will act similarly in similar circumstances. These are automatic actions because it may happen that after the act is over, the person may be quite unaware that he has performed it. Such automatic actions are quite opposite to those actions performed out of some ambition or sense of justice. Such type of actions always imply that the person is acting in some way by thinking or heeding what he was doing which also implies that the person would not have acted in that particular way if he had not been thinking what he was doing. According to Ryle, the phrase 'thinking what he was doing' is elusive as sometimes a person can do something out of his habit and yet he can be aware about what he doing by being a spectator of his habitual and reflex actions and can be an analyser of those actions without stopping or showing those actions as spontaneous. Ryle said:

[...the sense in which a person is thinking what he is doing, when his action is to be classed not as automatic but as done from a motive, is that he is acting more or less carefully, critically, consistently, and purposefully, adverbs which do not signify the prior or concomitant occurrence of extra operations of resolving, planning or cogitating, but only that the action taken is itself done not absent-mindedly but in a certain positive frame of mind.] (Geach, 1992).

Like Ryle, Aristotle also opined that to talk about motives is to talk about dispositions of a certain type that is different from competences. Aristotle

maintained that unlike any competence, a motive is a propensity which means that sometimes a man's motives becomes too strong, sometimes too weak and sometimes it may neither too strong nor too weak. Aristotle suggested that in appraising the moral sense of the term 'action', specific importance has been given to the exercise, proper or inadequate strength of the inclinations or motives of actions. For this reason, Aristotle opined that the strengths of those inclinations are changeable as it depends upon the person himself whether at a particular moment he will act from a strong or weak inclination. He may change his motive e.g., he may change a strong motive to weak one or a weak motive to a strong one. He may develop a second order inclination to develop or strengthen some of his weak inclination and weaken some of his strong propensities. Hence, whenever a certain inclination is too strong in a given agent, it is to say that the agent tends to act from that inclination even when he has the inclination to weaken that inclination by deliberately acting differently. It is the self-control of the agent to alter the situations and inclinations according to him and the agent can control and make a strong inclination to a weak one and vice versa. Whenever anyone is said to be acting impulsively then it means that the inclination behind the action is uncontrollable and it is in other words to label the inclination as too strong.

4.0 Difficulties in Ryle's Theory of Motives

Ryle's account of motives for action faces certain problems that prove that his formulation is not a satisfactory account of reasons for action. Philosophers like A. I. Goldman, Donald Davidson, G. E. M. Anscombe, Anthony Kenny and R. S. Peters etc. criticised Ryle in the sense that Ryle's concept of motive is not free from mistakes.

A. I. Goldman objected Ryle's account of feelings. Ryle deals with the concepts of enjoying and wanting in his *The Concept of Mind*. Ryle argues that wants are not any kind of feelings. He says, "Similar considerations, which need not be developed, would show that 'dislike', 'want', and 'desire' do not denote pangs, itchings or gnawings." (Goldman, 1970). From such statement, Ryle makes the unjustified inference that 'wants' are not any type of mental episode or events. He states:

Liking or disliking, joy or grief, desire and aversion are, then, not "internal" episodes which their owner witness, but his associates do not witness. They are

not episodes and so are not the sorts of things which can be witnessed or unwitnessed." (Goldman, 1970).

Goldman argues that Ryle is mistaken in this regard as wants are not feelings or sensations. Therefore, they are not mental episodes, as according to Goldman, the argument does not follow from the above statement made by Ryle in any way. Goldman maintains that there is no reason to think or suppose that feelings, sensations and sensory presentations exhaust the list of mental episodes.

Donald Davidson criticises Ryle's theory of motives as it does not dispense with primary reasons, but depends upon them. Ryle analyses 'he boasted from vanity' into the person boasted while meeting the stranger which satisfies a law-like proposition that whenever he gets a chance of acquiring the admiration and envy of other persons, he does that which he thinks will produce that admiration and envy. A person in such situations, in view of Ryle, acts lawfully or by following rules or laws to produce his desired end. According to Davidson, Ryle's analysis can be criticised on the ground that a man may boast from vanity just once. However, if what Ryle's boaster does what he does from vanity then what Ryle has maintained has to be true i.e., the boaster wants to secure the admiration and envy of others and he also believes that his doing so will produce his desired end. So, here belief and the want of the boaster is involved as one of the causes of his boasting and from such point of view, Davidson objected that Ryle's analysis of motives does not stop the way for primary reasons but depends upon them.

Bruce Aune also criticised Ryle by saying that Ryle's analysis of the boasting of the person is not accurate in its details. According to Aune, a man may boast from vanity without being a vain person or without having a permanent or long-term tendency to want the admiration and envy of others. Even a vain person may lack of satisfying the law-like proposition as Ryle has described. However, a man who boasts from vanity, boasts because of the kind of propensity that a vain man has with him. This propensity or inclination has many stages of development than Ryle implies.

G. E. M. Anscombe also criticised the same point by arguing that Ryle's account of motive cannot be right because according to Anscombe it is not possible to act out of a motive only once as maintained by Ryle as a man cannot act out of vanity once without being a vain person. A person can be motivated by greed

now and then without being a greedy person. Ryle's account of vanity seems to be curious and roundabout in expression. Anscombe could not agree with Ryle's account of motive unless that a man could not be said to have boasted from vanity unless the man always behaves vainly or often did so. Anscombe viewed that to give a motive is to say something as 'see the action in this light'. To explain one's own actions with the help of an account by indicating a motive is to put the actions in a certain light. However, it is difficult to believe that the light in which one puts one's action by indicating certain motives is a true light under which the action will be explained appropriately. Anscombe has pointed out that the law-like generalisation theory seems to lead to the conclusion that one cannot act out of motive on one occasion only. Like other previous thinkers, she also argues that it seems possible to act out of vanity or suddenly out of impatience without being an impatient person and out of remorse without being remorseful.

Anthony Kenny maintained that to act out of vanity is to do that thing which a vain man would do. Such a truism, if offered as an account of vanity is quite simple in comparison to the explanatory force of the term 'vanity'. Though Ryle's account of motive e.g.; vanity contains an explanatory element, yet this explanation is not contained in the generalisation, but in the description of the action, that is generalised. In the above case, the man boasted from vanity whenever his only aim was to secure the admiration and envy of the stranger. In such case, once it is known that what is the intention of the person, it would be not difficult to ascribe to him a motive. It does not any matter whether this person habitually acts with such an intention or not. Moreover, Ryle's account of intention seems to be less possible as whenever some kind of motive is ascribed to a person with the help of word e.g.; vanity, it becomes a character trait that refers to a particular state of affairs that the agent desires to realise. Here it is not necessary to enquire whether the person has acted habitually or not, as has been maintained by Ryle.

Again, there is something odd about Ryle's example of "He boasted out of vanity" as this statement says little about the phrase "He boasted" because to boast is precisely to make vain remarks about oneself. Boasting is a sign of vanity and in view of Kenny, such type of emotions do not express their own obvious manifestations. Reference to such emotions is necessary for those explanations where the actions are not immediate and characteristic manifestation of emotions.

Moreover, whenever Ryle attacked the 'impulse' theory of motives by calling it as a causal theory, then according to Anthony Kenny, Ryle himself provided a causal theory in his attempt to explicate the nature of motives or inclinations. Because to offer X as a causal explanation of Y is to say that whenever X then Y, then Ryle's explication of "he boasted from vanity" as "whenever an opportunity for boasting arrives, he takes it" can be interpreted as "he boasted from vanity" as a causal statement. However, Ryle's theory differs from the traditional causal theory only in the sense that his theory provides public circumstances, instead of private impulses, as in the case of the cause of the boasting.

Kenny does not agree with Ryle's account of the relation between motives and feelings. In view of Ryle, feelings are not intrinsically connected with motives, but rather with agitations like suspense and horror. In Ryle's theory of feeling when it has been stated as "I feel a twinge of remorse" then in view of Anthony Kenny, this statement has a causal aspect. Whenever someone says, "I feel a twinge of remorse" thereby the person is attaching a feeling to an emotional condition and this is nothing but a causal hypothesis. Hence, remorse is related to twinges of remorse as a cause-effect relation. According to Ryle, this cause-effect relation must be such that it must be possible to identify the effect independently of the cause. From this, it must be possible to say "this is the same kind of twinge as I felt yesterday" without making any appeal to what the twinge is previously as a criterion of identity. Then, in Ryle's theory, it would be possible to know that one has a tug, but it is not a tug of commiseration. Therefore, from this point of view, the meaning of the word 'tug' must be learnt quite independently of the meaning of the word 'commiseration'. However, it is not the case in reality as the meaning of the word 'tug' can only be known in a specific context when it is familiar with the use of the term 'commiseration'. It is the same case with other feeling words like twinges, flutters, throbs, glows, qualms etc. It is so because the meaning of these feeling words are associated with their corresponding states and only then the meaning of these words can be appropriately interpreted. Ryle has employed the appropriateness of these feeling words by referring to their corresponding states only to the feelings themselves.

Ryle does not suggest anything with regard to the meaning of the word "twinge" and how it might be learnt as according to him, its meaning can be known by its connection with the characteristic behaviour of toothache or the

characteristic behaviour of remorse. It implies that one can learn the meaning of the word "twinge" merely by having twinges. Hence, in words of Anthony Kenny, "internal impressions were firmly banished in his account of motives; they turn up again in the guise of feelings." (Kenny, 1994). Because of these reasons, Ryle has mistakenly started and taken it as a paradigm question in case of feelings as "how do I know what my feelings are feelings of?" instead of taking the right question, "how do I know that another man has such and such a motive, or skill, or state of mind?" In this way, Anthony Kenny criticised Ryle's formulation of the theory of motive on the above mentioned grounds.

R. S. Peters also maintained that Ryle's treatment of motives is very confusing because Ryle has used the term 'motive' too much as a blanket term. Ryle in his attempt to refute to view that motives are mental occurrences and ghostly thrusts, he claimed that explanations in terms of motives does not always refer to inner occurrences in the mind but to some disposition or character traits. He used the term 'inclination' to denote the term 'motive'. According to Ryle, the inclinations and modes, agitations are not occurrences because they do not take place either publicly or privately. They are propensities and not acts or states. These inclinations, according to Ryle come under the term 'emotion'. He maintained that these emotions are feelings. Motive, emotions have another sense than people's higher-level behaviour. If a person is vain, considerate, avaricious, patriotic or indolent, then these are some species of emotion and feelings. According to Ryle, vanity, considerateness, patriotism, and interest are motives. Though these are dispositions, yet they are known as motives of action as they do not imply any direction or directedness. Directedness is a main characteristic of the concept of motive. Ryle, in his attempt to reject the claim that motives refer to inner emotional states, has failed to distinguish between the various types of disposition which he mistakenly considers as some emotional states. Peters claims that Ryle has conceived the nature of motives wrongly and equated the concept of motive with other factors that are not at all motives of action. Hence, Peters maintained that motives are, "used to refer to a reason of a directed sort and implies a directed disposition in the individual whose conduct is being assessed." (Peters, 1960).

5.0 Conclusion

Ryle's account of motive is subject to various difficulties in reality that show that his account of motive was not free from criticisms and it is not a satisfactory account of motive explanation. Ryle's theory of motive known as reason for action cannot provide any appropriate answer for the performance of different kinds of actions. Moreover, Ryle's explanation about motive and different kinds of emotions and feelings has not been able to explain 'action' satisfactorily and cannot provide a sufficient description of various reasons for action. In spite of Ryle's account of motive, inclinations, and dispositions has been rejected as proper explanations of human actions, yet he is an important figure for talking about and discussing motives of human actions in a very detailed and systematic manner. Ryle's account of motive cannot be rejected just as a mere description only basing upon those criticisms, in fact, his theory has a significant value in providing a precise and detailed discussion about the concept of motive.

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