

Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Chapter 1

This is an old book (1949) but well written and worth reading in its entirety. I would like to concentrate on Chapter 1. In it Ryle describes what he calls “the official doctrine.” According to this doctrine there are two aspects to our existence – what the philosopher Rene Descartes would call two “substances.” One is purely physical. It is your body and everything pertaining to your body. It is only with your body that you interact with the physical world. The other aspect or substance is – well, it’s hard to say. Ryle calls it non-physical. You might call it mental or spiritual. It is the realm of your thoughts, your private internal world. If you believe in God you would interact with Him on this plane. Nowadays this is called substance dualism or Cartesian dualism, and it is emphatically *not* the official doctrine, thanks in part to Ryle’s devastating criticisms. In fact, if you accused your philosopher friend of being a substance dualist he or she might challenge you to a duel!

I would like you to do the following:

- Summarize Ryle’s arguments.
- Ryle attacks a rather extreme version of dualism. As you can imagine, philosophers who wanted to hold on to dualism tried to “tweak” the theory to avoid the criticisms. Can you think of ways of doing this?

The obvious alternative to dualism is monism, the doctrine that mental phenomena are just physical phenomena. This is also vulnerable to various criticisms as we will see as we go along. At the end of the day some philosophers find themselves reluctantly returning to some form of dualism.