The Nature of Mind
according to David M. Armstrong

PHIL 100w (Introduction to Knowledge and Reality)

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What is the **nature of the mind?**
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- having a perception
- having sensations
- having desires
- having thoughts
- having beliefs
- having purposes
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So, the question ‘what is mind?’ is associated with

- what is it to perceive?
- what is it to have emotions?
- etc.
Now, of course, sometimes popular culture blurs things... Apparently, mindless zombies can now fall in love!
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Take a human. What is it? Is it just a body, a mechanism? Is there something else, a different type of ‘substance’?
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The mechanism appeared to be able to play a strong game of chess against a human opponent. But it was a hoax.
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Ryle’s (1900-1976) analysis came up against that; he tried to naturalize our understanding of the mind by attacking the ‘ghost in the machine view’, and replace it by a *behaviorist account*.
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We examine the paper

**The Nature of Mind**

from his 1981 book

**The Nature of Mind and Other Essays.**
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Armstrong approaches physicalism from another direction; for him, it is not forced by logical analysis.
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  hormonal effects on moods and behaviour
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But why **scientism**? Why concede authority to science about the nature of humans, and the nature of mind in particular?
Armstrong’s argument for Physicalism/Materialism

Are not science,
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Are not science, philosophy,
Are not science, philosophy, religion,
Are not science, philosophy, religion, morality,
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Are not science, philosophy, religion, morality, literature,
Are not science, philosophy, religion, morality, literature, art, etc, all to be equally considered?
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Q: can it decide the right kind of question for our issue?
Ryle achieved Physicalism through Behaviorism.

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If mental processes are identical to their expressions, then there is no tension with a physicalist approach.
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Instead of identifying mental processes with actual behaviour, he identifies them with **dispositions to behave**.

“To possess a dispositional property **is not to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change**; it is to be bound or liable to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change, when particular condition is realised.”
Example of a disposition: Brittleness

“Brittleness is a disposition, a disposition possessed by materials like glass. Brittle materials are those which, when subjected to relatively small forces, break or shatter easily. But breaking and shattering easily is not brittleness, rather it is the manifestation of brittleness.”
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Other examples? flammable, poisonous
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We are still identifying states with outward acts: there is no ‘mysterious internal arena’ unidentified with behaviour.
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Is this satisfactorily facing the challenge?
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His positive view is as follows:

“Thought is not speech under suitable circumstances, rather it is something within the person which, in suitable circumstances brings about speech.”
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Now, is this a friendly or devastating amendment?
Armstrong’s Amendment

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  “We have discovered that the brittleness of glass is in fact a certain sort of pattern in the molecules of the glass.”

Similarly, dispositions are to be identified with mental states.
However, conceptualized in this way, dispositions require talking about an internal arena of mental processes, and so they can’t save Behaviourism.
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Then,

“[…] it becomes a scientific question, and not a question of logical analysis, what in fact the intrinsic nature of that cause is. The cause might be, as Descartes thought it was, a spiritual substance working through the pineal gland to produce the complex bodily behaviour which men are capable.”
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“But in fact the verdict of modern science seems to be that the sole cause of mind-betokening behaviour in man and the higher animals is the physico-chemical workings of the central nervous system.”
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“But in fact the verdict of modern science seems to be that the sole cause of mind-betokening behaviour in man and the higher animals is the physico-chemical workings of the central nervous system.”

So, based on science, we should identify mental states with physical states of the central nervous system, not with some other substance.
So, let’s summarize:

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3. This view is compatible and indeed supports (but not in a purely logical way) physicalism.

4. The debate can be understood dialectically: Thesis (non-naturalistic account), antithesis (Ryle’s Behaviourism), synthesis (Armstrong position).
More discussion:

- A key point here is: what sort of thing can be shown by logical analysis, and what can be learned by scientific inquiry?
- What about consciousness? How does Armstrong approach this problem?