

The Ethics of Transhumanism from the Perspective of Gilbert Ryle Monist Ethics: Ambiguities and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

Transhumanism attempts to overcome human limitations through the use of technology, such as nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, and genetic modifications. In the monist ethical perspective, humans are considered complex material entities, and consciousness is understood as a product of the physical and chemical interactions in the brain with various other parts of the body. The problem is that with such artificial revolutions, ethical foundations based on corporeal limitations become irrelevant. Gilbert Ryle questions Platonistic dispositions that overly rely on reduction with the consequence of extractive knowledge rather than abstract knowledge. Plato's line of thought is then strengthened by Cartesian dualism, which, when applied in a monist perspective, can be reduced to an extraction of brain performance. Ryle proposes an abstraction that allows for the interaction between elements to form a unified understanding of the complex. Based on Ryle's thinking, a study of monist ethics can offer a thoughtful approach to constructing an ethical framework that aligns with the transhumanist era's revolution.

ABSTRAK

Transhumanisme mencoba untuk mengatasi keterbatasan manusia melalui penggunaan teknologi, seperti nanoteknologi, kecerdasan buatan, dan modifikasi genetik. Dalam pandangan etika monis, manusia dianggap sebagai entitas materi yang kompleks dan kesadaran dipahami sebagai produk dari interaksi fisik dan kimia dalam interaksi otak dengan berbagai anggota tubuh lainnya. Masalahnya, dengan revolusi artifisial semacam ini, fondasi etika yang didasarkan pada keterbatasan korporeal tidak lagi relevan. Gilbert Ryle mempersoalkan disposisi Platonik yang terlalu mengandalkan reduksi dengan konsekuensi pengetahuan yang ekstraktif dan bukan abstraktif. Garis pemikiran Plato ini kemudian menguat pada dualisme Kartesian, yang bila diterapkan dalam perspektif monis dapat tereduksi menjadi sebuah ekstraksi akan kinerja otak. Ryle mengusulkan abstraksi yang memberi ruang pada interaksi antarelemen untuk membentuk sebuah kesatuan pemahaman akan yang kompleks. Berdasarkan pemikiran Ryle ini, sebuah kajian etika monis dapat menjadi tawaran bernas untuk sebuah konstruksi etis yang sesuai dengan revolusi era manusia transhumanis.

1. INTRODUCTION

This text discusses the inevitability of humans facing disruptive technological advancements that not only assist them but also have the potential to significantly replace human roles (Newman & Blanchard, 2019). The development of robotics, especially artificial intelligence, represents a fundamental turning point, shifting the foundation of subjective-objective interactions to horizontally oriented relationships. This shift is primarily due to the intellectual breakthrough of mathematical and mechanical characteristics, capable of addressing various practical issues in human life (Strogatz, 2020). Mathematical models can be applied to problems that involve infinity assumptions.

Technological advancements have touched a new horizon, completely altering the "rules of the game" in technological development and mastery. One of the most fundamental and hyper-disruptive aspects is the ability of machines to produce machines (Boyer, 2018). This invasive aspect has transformed business models to their core. Companies must now prioritize artificial intelligence as a primary element in their day-to-day operations, ranging from technology-based businesses to those utilizing social media as their technological instrument (Hackl, Lueth, Di Bartolo, 2022).

On one hand, such developments result in a highly potential synergy between humans and machines. There are challenges of scale and speed in decision-making that can only be managed through intense interaction between humans and technology (Malone, 2018). There are also phenomena of equalization and even democratization of resources, leading to technosocialism trends that cannot be contained within classical capitalist models (King & Petty, 2021). Nevertheless, the stage of human civilization in the 21st century is not exempt from fundamental moral issues.

One of the most pressing issues is the impact of social media on the democratic process, especially concerning dark and negative campaigns that influence voting outcomes, subsequently disrupting political governance and development processes (Aral, 2020). This issue becomes particularly problematic when considering the extrapolation of technological developments. Technological progress can turn into a disaster when critical decision-making control that affects the well-being of many is in the hands of machines (Tegmark, 2017).

The disaster could even be existential, meaning the risk of civilization annihilation reaches a point beyond the reach of reconstruction efforts (Ord, 2020). One of the greatest threats is nuclear war, a legacy of the Cold War era. However, the more current threat is the climate crisis and the elimination of human agency in creation.

One of the most frequently referred thoughts in studies involving the struggle between humans and machines is that of Nick Bostrom. In essence, Bostrom emphasizes the risk rather than the opportunity in the development of artificial intelligence technology (Bostrom, 2014). Another prominent voice is that of Yuval Noah Harari, who has now shifted towards advocating for human strength – a perspective that can be said to have been overlooked in Bostrom's analysis (Harari, 2015). In short, technological development is no longer seen as something ordinary, akin to the discovery of the wheel, metal, and locomotives by humans (Harari, 2018).

The primary issue lies in the nature of the technological power itself. Humans no longer have complete control over their creations, and machines cannot be entirely subdued by human power. Nevertheless, despite the negative definition of transhumanism, there are opportunities behind all these concerns. Advancements in knowledge and all digital tools in nanometre dimensions can lead humans to improve their physical quality and, in turn, their quality of life (More, Vita-More, & Hughes, 2010). The impact of all these developments is the obsolescence of the definition of humanity.

Furthermore, Cartesian dualism, the foundation of normative ethical theories, is becoming outdated and irrelevant. As an illustration, with biomedical technology such as activating telomerase enzymes, humans can live longer – even on a scale of hundreds of years (Parsa, 2013). In this lifelong span, concepts of traditional marriage and relationships must be reconsidered

because all ethical doctrines about marriage are still based on the fact that humans only live within a range of decades, not hundreds of years. Cartesian theory is generally based on the aging of the body – so if the body no longer ages, this theory becomes obsolete.

René Descartes proposed a separation between the temporary (*res extensa*) and the eternal (*res cogitans*), or body and mind (Clark, 1997). The path taken by Descartes ultimately led to a causal impasse: he failed to explain the connection between mind and body, falling into speculative explanations (Dennett, 1987). Another problem arising from Descartes' arguments is how an immaterial mind can perceive experiential impressions that are material in nature (Chalmers, 1996). This point is actually a continuation of the first weakness in Descartes' argument, and even as neuroscience advances rapidly, Descartes' speculations become counterproductive to scientific progress.

This weakness has revived interest in monism, which can provide a more accurate and reliable explanation (Churchland, 1986). Monism is not a new field in philosophy; G.W. Leibniz had already developed this theory centuries before the peak of neuroscience in the late 20th century. Leibniz proposed monads as the most fundamental entities, serving as the basis for other elements; a concept that later became highly applicable in the era of computing through the emulation of computer programs on the functioning of the human brain (Sandberg & Bostrom, 2011).

Continuing Leibniz's work, Baruch Spinoza offered a transition of the ultimate reality from something anthropomorphic to something amorphous – a concept introduced through *Deus sive natura* (MacIntyre, 2007). In this theory, the issue of mind and body becomes irrelevant because they are not strictly separated. The elimination of this dividing line makes the explanation of the material aspects of the mind and body clear: that the mind is essentially neuronal signals understood through the interactive work of interconnected regions (Searle, 1992).

Interestingly, this monist disposition brings relevant consequences to the causal relationship between one event and another. Even ethical perspectives can be explained by examining similar patterns found in nature (Nussbaum, 2013). Ethical issues shift from normative demands to harmonious metaethics. Emphasizing causal patterns that are not just a collection of correlations makes Spinoza highly relevant to revisit. Moreover, various studies have successfully mapped neuronal interaction areas more accurately – even extending to regions that respond to subjective experiences (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008).

This Spinozist disposition is also supported by various pieces of evidence refuting dualism. Various deficiencies in the medical world can be explained directly – without correlation – by treating specific areas of the human brain (Churchland & Churchland, 1998). Conversely, altering the composition of the brain also affects how a person responds to their environment; a person's personality is actually neuro-personality and neuro-subjectivity (Nagel, 1986). This characteristic can only be explained through the monist approach proposed by Spinoza. Objections to dualism make this approach increasingly difficult to accept, at least in scientific disciplines, because separate consciousness from the body (Churchland, 2013) contradicts the natural character of the human biological body (Searle, 1992).

However, Spinoza still does not explicitly talk about material, and his approach still focuses on existence manifested in the form of ideas (Spinoza, 2002). This issue then becomes a difficulty for Spinoza to draw his thoughts to serve as a foundation for the monist approach. The author attempts to examine this Spinozian disposition through the exploration conducted by Gilbert Ryle.

Another issue is related to transhumanism. Stefan L. Sorgner emphasizes that the condition of transhumanism is a transit point towards posthumanism (Sorgner, 2021). In other words, the requirement to be called a transhuman entity is the existence of organic human elements and augmentation elements, which can be artificial body organs not only intended for medical purposes but also for enhancing or optimizing the human body. This point further challenges Spinoza's natural monism because the process of augmenting the human body is done in material form.

The goal of this research is, therefore, to seek ethical perspectives that can address the most current and urgent challenges related to technological development that began in the second decade of this century. The research question is: how can we create an ethical perspective that embraces today's paradigm of monism?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research examines the main ideas presented by Gilbert Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* and then contrasts them with the opinions of Jerry Fodor, Daniel Dennett, and Thomas Nagel. The selection of Ryle is based on two main reasons. First, Descartes essentially embraced thoughts along the lines of reductionism. In other words, various monist thinkers, fundamentally, still couldn't completely detach their footing from the foundation laid by Descartes, even though their rejection of dualism was strong. According to the author, Descartes represents one of the attempts to accentuate the construction of reductionist discourse.

Second, Ryle offers an argumentative line that attempts to fully break away from reductionist premises in favour of a discourse structure of interactionism. Ryle's interactionist approach aligns with a neo-Spinozist perspective, attempting to provide additional insights into the materialism side of Spinoza's thought construction. However, criticism of interactionism cannot be dismissed.

Based on these considerations, the author then debates Ryle's ideas with the thoughts of Fodor, Dennett, and Nagel. The opinions of these three thinkers represent three dispositions of rejection toward interactionism – with the strongest objection coming from Fodor. Dennett moderates criticism from the reductionist perspective, while Nagel attempts to find a middle ground between reductionism and interactionism.

Secondly, in line with technological advancements, the author will attempt to explore the connections between Ryle's propositions and facets of the technological world, especially the development of quantum computing technology. This phenomenological aspect aims to examine the prospects of interactionism, transcending the ambiguity of its dispositions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ryle questions how oblivious thinkers are to the interaction of the entire elements (Ryle, 1949). For example, what is called a "city" is a unity of the city's boundaries and all elements within it, extending to the infrastructure underground (fibre optic cables, pipe networks, and the like). Reducing the city to just the "city hall" by assuming that all elements of the city will behave homogeneously is a severe misconception. Similarly, the agenda to only seek the causal elements of thought in a biological system and disregard its ecosystem and biomatter is a fatal error (Ryle, 1949).

Ryle's formative period began by questioning Plato's reductionism. Plato's mission to seek the essence of the universe started by proposing speculative conditions about the existence of eidos. In "Plato's Progress," Ryle criticizes reductionism through a self-critical disciple-master analysis of Aristotle (Ryle, 1966). According to the author, Ryle's path aims to illustrate argumentatively how the premises of reductionism will eventually collapse on their own. For the author, Ryle's Aristotelian moderation represents a wise approach to deal with the reckless tendency to truncate reality. By pulling Plato off the stage, Ryle attempts to find an approach more suited to reality.

Ryle's arguments are aimed at negating the role of autonomous authority that forms the basis of everything (Ryle, 1949). According to Ryle, the indecisiveness in the early 20th century led thinkers like Meinong, Frege, Bradley, Peirce, G.E. Moore, Russell, and even Wittgenstein to densify their argumentative ammunition by imparting idiosyncratic charges to Platonic and Kantian phenomena (Ryle, 1971a:186-95). Ryle argues that the eidetic obsession extrapolated

from Plato's line tends to deviate significantly. The freezing of this conceptualization not only escapes and seeks new semantic balances but also undermines various attempts to find solutions relevant to the developments in science and technology.

The biggest problem of reductionism for Ryle is its acute tendency to extract rather than abstract (Ryle, 1971b:463). Extraction is treated as an absolute *significatum* and *pronunciatum*. In Ryle's light, knowledge in modernity behaves like a crusher, extracting from anything. Even Husserl, according to Ryle, erred by diverting the locus of essence from "part of" to "essence." Husserl's *epoché* ultimately shifted from suspension to an ambitious project that ended in absolute reduction. One manifestation of such ambition is the universal equation project in modern physics.

In modern physics, the main goal of all scientific endeavours is to find what is called a universal equation – or "God's equation" (Azcel, 2000). Despite its name, this project is not a religious endeavour at all. In short, physicists attempt to find the most fundamental force that can unify two major forces: gravity and electromagnetism. Their confidence increased as they could unite the strong nuclear force and weak nuclear force into the electromagnetic force. However, efforts to unify gravity and electromagnetism have hit a roadblock until now – especially because gravity turned out to be not as easily explained as electromagnetism.

Ryle argues that the scientific exploration of modernity's project has fallen into fundamentalist reductionism – and even defiance (Ryle, 1949). One of Ryle's arguments can be understood with the following analogy. If an artifact from an archaeological site in region A is treated as a word X, then the entire excavation area is treated as a sentence M. Word X only has meaning if context M envelops that word. Detaching word X from sentence M means separating the context of X from its parental context – M. The assumption that every word X has an autonomous context X is a defiance. Consider the following example:

	Element 1	Element 2	Element 3	Element 4
Sentence R	father	is buying	bread	
Sentence S	father	is buying	bread	maker

Treating the phrase "is buying" as an independent verbal element, according to Ryle, is a substantial error. The phrase "is buying" loses its ethical context when the phrase "is buying" (element 2) and "bread" (element 3) in sentence R is further combined with the word "maker" (element 4) in sentence S, making the word "bread" a new component (element 3). In sentence S, the phrase "is buying" becomes an unethical action, implying elements of slavery or exploitation. However, Ryle does not hastily affirm the anti-essentialist claim, which is actually very problematic.

For Ryle, the interaction of each element will change its contextual disposition, although once again, that does not mean essence is non-existent (Ryle, 1971a). If we replace the word "is buying" in element 2 of sentence S with the word "is greeting," the context of that word changes, as does the contextual impact of sentence S. According to Ryle's line of thought, essence is "trivialized" when frozen, or conversely, obliterated. A word must be treated as a building block: we can guess its function – and there is a functional line that ontologically limits possibilities – but how that context operates is only found in interaction.

The biggest challenge to Ryle's interactionist idea may come from divergent thought patterns. Educators identify creativity as a manifestation of divergent thinking (Robinson, 2001). A knife can be used not only as a cooking or killing tool but can become a clock in an artist's hand, a doorstep in a playful teenager's hand, a sacred ornament in a religious leader's hand, and so on. However, there is an ontological issue overlooked by anti-essentialists: the knife has a sharp blade that cannot be disputed, and this blade becomes a component ready to be abstracted with other elements to form an interactional context.

Against Ryle's idea, Jerry A. Fodor objects to the neutral character of non-reductionist essence. According to Fodor, by positing the neutrality of the model to be abstracted, Cartesian and

Neo-Cartesian problems cannot be resolved. Rejection, for Fodor, must have a launching pad, which Fodor calls associationism (Fodor, 1983:23-38). The prerequisites for interaction are not as casual as imagined by Ryle. Interaction is only possible through associative and closed interaction.

Dennett, on the other hand, provides a crucial note on the prerequisites for interaction. Interaction does not just happen – and Dennett presents the following analogy. Connecting various applications inside a computer and a mobile phone is not done by physically stacking a laptop and a mobile phone (Dennett, 2017). Unlike Fodor, Dennett emphasizes the importance of the network that connects the two, meaning that both connected elements must be ready to be connected. Dennett opens up non-associative interaction space, but this means that what is connected must have certain characteristics with what is connected. Referring to the analogy of a laptop and a phone, there must be an operating system ready to interact. The author calls it open association.

Nagel provides another note on the relationship between the internal and the external. The issue, for Nagel, is about the character of the interaction between the internal as something specific and the external as something general. Rejecting reductionism will trigger explanations of how exactly the external interacts with the internal (Nagel, 1986). In Nagel's light, interaction does not automatically guarantee a form of reciprocal relationship, in the sense that the internal reacts as actively as the external. There is a possibility that the internal behaves passively, or vice versa.

Against this objection, the author sees it as an enhancement of the ideas proposed by Ryle. Ryle's monism can be said to be a successful Neo-Spinozist attempt to overcome the weaknesses of Spinoza's argument without succumbing to reductionist dualism. Fodor, Dennett, and Nagel optimize Ryle's proposed theory by solidifying the parameters needed to characterize Ryle's monistic materialism relationships. Once again, Ryle does not underestimate internal reality or glorify external reality. Rather, Ryle's point about abstraction and not extraction is a strong foundation for refuting reductionism.

4. CONCLUSION

The author will present three main prospects from Gilbert Ryle's ideas associated with monist ethics. First, by discarding dualist dispositions, objectification by the subject is automatically removed. Normative ethics becomes more flexible to enter areas that were previously problematic culturally. Normativity in ethics is essentially a highly counterproductive burden. As an illustration, racism and discrimination remain difficult issues to resolve with normative ethics. Ryle's monist materialism can provide more convincing arguments than normative ethics to address racial discrimination issues.

Second, by trimming reductionist efforts, the external, or externality, is no longer considered trivial. Various ethical issues related to animals, plants, and the environment are almost impossible to resolve with normative ethics. For example, acts of animal abuse are something that cannot be resolved by deontological or utilitarian approaches because their anthropocentric focus leaves no room for the defense of basic animal rights (Singer, 2001[1975]). Monist ethics can embrace various advocacy efforts by providing convincing argumentative foundations that can be the basis for drafting animal protection laws.

Third, Ryle's thought-based monistic ethics can be a powerful point to include various transhumanist augmentation practices related to new organ organs or metabolism. In line with what Bostrom and Harari have said, humans need to enhance their status to become transhuman (Bostrom, 2014; Harari, 2016). This means that according to Bostrom and Harari, humans will enter a transitional period that slowly but surely transforms the physical form of humans. In other words, Ryle's monist ethics, free from the burden of the dichotomy of autonomous subjects and scientific duties that are extractive.

5. SUGGESTIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the research we conducted, we present five concluding points and a recommendation, as outlined below:

1. Normative ethics based on Cartesian dualism is problematic and no longer relevant to the developments in transhumanism.
2. Ryle rejects the principle of dualism and attempts to offer the concept of monism that complements the monism proposed by Spinoza.
3. Ryle's monistic materialism addresses the weaknesses of dualism from two perspectives: eliminating the subject-object dichotomy and replacing extraction with abstraction.
4. Following the argumentative path provided by Ryle, Ryle's monistic ethics can overcome various dilemmas arising from the limitations of dualistic reductionist normative ethics.
5. Ryle's monistic ethics can harness recent developments in transhumanism, including the augmentation of human organ systems aimed at improving human quality of life.
6. Further research on Ryle's non-normative ethics in real-world cases involving organ transplantation for enhancement purposes needs to be conducted to assess the strength of the ideas proposed by Ryle.

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