

THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

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Introduction

The problem of the mind and body relationship occupies a pivotal position in the philosophy of mind. Alternative theories have been discussed to offer solutions to this problem, but the problem is unsolved yet. The sole problem was due to the consideration that, since body is physical and mind is non-physical, body is spatial and mind is non-spatial, body occupies some space and mind does not occupy any space; body is one type of substance and mind is another type of substance, how can they be related? Let us consider different views and different doctrines, viz., Descartes' interactionism, Spinoza's parallelism, Leibniz's pre-established harmony, epiphenomenalism, the double-aspect theory and the mind – brain identity theory in this context.



Descartes' Interactionism

Descartes maintains that there is only one substance, i.e. God and there are other two relative substances, mind and body.¹ These two exist independently of one another as substance but ultimately both depend upon God. Mind is diametrically opposed to body. The attribute of body is extension.² The bodies are passive. The attribute of mind is thinking and the mind is active.³ In this respect the two substances are absolutely different from each other. If these two substances exclude one another in respect of their nature, it follows that there can be no interaction between them. The function of the body is completely different from the function of the mind. Descartes held that there are certain facts which point to an intimate union between body and mind in man. For instance-appetites of hunger and thirst; emotions and passions of mind which are not exclusively mental affections nor bodily affections. These we cannot refer to the body alone or to the mind alone, but these can be explained by the close and intimate relationship between the two. Therefore, Descartes suggests that pineal gland is an organ that regulates these two, which works like a mediator between mind and body. It exists somewhere in the soul. This theory is known as “**Interactionism**”.⁴ Because the interaction between the two takes place internally inside the body.

Further, Descartes held that however mind and body are united through pineal gland; they (mind-body) do their functions differently. His idea here seems to be that the relation between mind and body is not such that a physical state becomes a mental state, produces or causes a mental state, or vice-versa: the mind is simply troubled by organic processes. Therefore, sometimes, he accepts the theory of causal interaction



without hesitation. The soul (mind), though united with the whole body, exercises its functions more particularly, or has its principal seat, in the pineal gland of the brain. Movements are caused by sensible objects in the animal spirits and transferred to the pineal gland; in this way sensations are produced. The soul can also move the gland in different ways; this motion is transferred to the animal spirits and conducted by them over the nerves into the muscles. Here the relation between the mind and the body is vividly conceived as causal: through the mediation of the pineal gland a certain interaction is brought about between them.

Some critics did not accept interactionism on the following ground that how can a physical substance come in contact with the mental substance? It is not possible to explain the physical by the mental and the mental by the physical as mind is one type of substance and body is another type of substance. If pineal gland can regulate these two, can we say that pineal gland is physical? If it is so, then, here a physical substance could come in contact with the mental substance. Now the further question is raised whether the pineal gland is spiritual or physical? There is no doubt that a gland is a physical one. It cannot be spiritual. So the possibility of contact through pineal gland (which is physical) is not acceptable. Spinoza did not accept Descartes' dualism. Descartes mentioned that there are two "relative substances", i.e. mind and body. He held that there could be only one substance and if there were more than one, they would limit each other and would destroy their mutual substantiality. In the opinion of Spinoza the phrase "relative substances" seemed self-contradictory.

Spinoza's Parallelism

According to Spinoza, there is one substance, but there are infinite number of attributes, out of these human beings can know two only, namely, mental (thought) and physical (extension).⁵ Spinoza considers God or nature is a combination of both mind and body. Therefore, wherever there is space or matter, there is soul or mind and vice-versa. The two attributes (thought and extension), being essential to the nature of substance, must be present wherever the substance is found and that is everywhere. Thought and extension are each infinite in its own kind, but not absolutely infinite, that is, neither thought nor extension is the sole attribute; since there are many other attributes of God, none of them, can be called absolutely infinite. These attributes are absolutely independent of one another and cannot influence each other. Spinoza holds that the physical cannot be explained by the mental and the mental cannot be explained by the physical. The two are different from each other like the two parallel tracks of the train-line. The two tracks of train-line never meet each other. There cannot be causal relation between the mental and the physical. Spinoza here accepts the doctrine of the occasionalists and Malebranche, that only like can produce like, that mind cannot produce motion nor motion mind. These two are events only occur simultaneously. Spinoza says that for every mental event there is a physical event corresponding to it in the brain. But the reverse is not true.⁶ There are many physical events, like the digestion of food, for which there is not mental correlate at all. A physical does not cause the mental. There is one-to-one correlation between them. Therefore, Spinoza



considers his theory as “**psychophysical parallelism**”.⁷

But some philosophers did not accept this “**psychophysical parallelism**”. They argued that in order to produce a result both (mental and physical) is inevitable. They maintain that no house was ever built, no book was ever written; without the occurrence of both the mental and the physical. The parallelist does not deny this, so this theory appears to be unsound.

Leibniz’s Pre-established Harmony

Leibniz gives a new theory regarding the relationship between mind and body. Leibniz asserts that there are infinite numbers of monads,⁸ out of them; mind and body are two different monads. Leibniz holds that all monads are different in degrees, not in kind. We can find a monad in a very small form and also in the large form. Our sense of perceiving the monads may be different, but it does not affect those. For instance, in the early morning, when we go to the garden, we see dew drops different sizes on the grass. We can see the reflection of the sun on the smaller drops as well as on the large one. But it makes no difference as far as the sun is concerned.

Every monad has the power of perception or representation. Leibniz maintains that there is the original monad or the monad of monads or the highest and the perfect monad. Leibniz considers that monad to be “**Queen Monad**” or “**Monad Monadium**”.⁹ On the other hand, he considers that the lowest monad to be the bare monad (which has very lowest perception). Further, he expresses that monads are windowless. Nothing can come in and nothing can come out. Now, the question is raised, since monads are windowless, how are they related? Leibniz replies that these are pre-arranged by some external power or by some unknown power. He names it “**Pre-established Harmony**”.¹⁰ Once again the question is raised, by whom are these pre-arranged? Who is the creator of the monads? Leibniz takes the help of God as the source of pre-arrangement and the creator. God has arranged the order and the working of all the monads in such a way that a grand plan in His mind may be fulfilled. The monads, no doubt, work independently of all other monads according to their own inner urge, but this inner plan coincides with the realization of the one master plan in the mind of the creator. Because each monad tries to realize in the same final end in the mind of the creator, therefore, a harmony is reached in their working. “This combination of independence and harmony may be compared to different chairs of musicians playing their parts separately, and so situated that they do not see or even hear one another. Nevertheless they keep perfectly together, by each following their own notes, in such a way that one who hears them all finds in them a harmony that is wonderful and much more perfect than if there had been any connection between them.”¹¹

Some philosophers maintain that the theory of Leibniz has some limitations. They claim that Leibniz is in trouble when he says that God is the creator of monads. The opponents maintain that if God is the creator of monads, then monads become ‘finite’ and ‘created’ and cease to be self-contained units.¹² If the monads are allowed to be eternal, independent and self-contained units, then God as creator becomes



unnecessary and absurd. Leibniz chooses to be inconsistent by taking God as the creator of the pre-established harmony.

The opponents again criticized Leibniz owing to the view that monad is a series of reflection or representation. The question is raised with the inquiry about the reflection of “what”? Leibniz would say that the ultimate reality reflected in each monad in the clear and distinct thought in the mind of God. Each monad, then, is an emanation of God, and then becomes the only reality and all other monads become either an imperfect appearance or a modification of God. In this ground, Leibniz theory becomes more theological than philosophical.

Epiphenomenalism

Let us consider a different view that is “**Epiphenomenalism**”. According to this view, the mind is nothing but an “epiphenomenon” of the body.¹³ Minds relation to the body is like that of the smoke to the locomotive or shadow to the person. The motions of the person cause the motions of his shadow, but the motions of the shadow do not in turn cause the motion in the person. Similarly the physical causes the mental, but the mental never in turn causes the physical. In order to build a beautiful house, I need a lot of physical labour. But at the same time, first I have to set a perfect plan or idea, how to build? So, before performing physical work, we need the help of mental construction. But for the mental activities, the physical is not a necessary prerequisite.¹⁴

Some philosopher did not accept this theory. They argue that when the physical causes the mental, the mental also causes the physical. “**Epiphenomenalism**” maintains that due to the person, the shadow exists. For them, the person (physical) is the primary and the shadow (mental) is the secondary. But in reality the opposite thing occurs. Before preparing a beautiful building, we need the help of the mental. Here, mental is the primary and the physical is the secondary. Hence, this “epiphenomenalism” violates his own view.

The double-aspect theory

This theory maintains that mental (mind) and physical (body) are merely two aspects of the same underlying substance.¹⁵ The substance itself is unknowable and unknown by the human beings, but two of its aspects, the mental and the physical are known. It is as if one is passing down a corridor with a mirror on both right and left, and one’s body is reflected in both mirrors. One mirror is the physical and the other, the mental and they both simultaneously reflect different aspects of the same substance, you. Further, mind and body are two aspects of a single substance.

This is easy enough to see in the case of the mirror, but not so easy to see in the case of the mental-physical relation. We can speak about of “two aspects of the same thing”, “two sides of the same coin”, and so on; but precisely what is it of which the mental and the physical are two aspects?¹⁶ It would seem that in attempting to get rid of one mystery (or at any rate one ultimate fact), we have got stuck with another. Instead of saying that mental-physical correlations are ultimate laws of nature, we attempt to explain them by saying that they are two aspects of some underlying substance- a substance with which, however, no one, has any acquaintance, and of



which no one has any knowledge.

Mind-brain identity theory

The speculative explanations offered by the philosophers did not appeal to them, who have inclination for scientific methodology or sciences. Scientific considerations of human morphology do not allow any special status either to the mind or the mental phenomena.¹⁷ Biological details regarding the various parts of the body altogether deny mind as a part of the body. In this respect, the reality of mind is completely denied. But some have maintained that mental activities (thinking, feeling, willing, imaging and memorizing) etc. are due to the presence of the mind in the physical man. They draw that there is a mind because of the mental activities. Such a view illustrates that mind is spatially located somewhere inside the body of a man (as if ghost is present inside a closed chamber of a man or like the captain in a ship).¹⁸

It is also claimed that the mind is considered to be a metaphysical presupposition made on the basis of the special activities performed by the human brain. Brain activities are regarded as the mental activities.¹⁹ It is presumed from expressions concerning mental activities that there must be a mind which is the locus of the mental activities. Mental activities are performed by the nervous system. It is the nervous system that conducts the mental activities. Mind is represented by the brain and its activities and vice-versa. This theory further says that mental activities are nothing but the behavioural activities.²⁰ If it is accepted, then there will be no problem in relating the two substances which are physical. Since both are physical, there can be interaction between the two. There is identity between mind and brain. Mind is physical because it is identical with the physical brain. This is called “**mind-brain identity theory**”.²¹

Professor J.J.C. Smart is one of the pioneers of the identity theory. He maintains that all mental states are indeed brain processes. He has also originally applied the identity theory only to the case of sensations. Smart insists that the having of an after-image, the feeling of a pain, or the occurrence of a thought is claimed to be identical, as a matter of empirical fact, with some event occurring in the brain. The two occurrences are held to be identical with a particular sort of electrical discharge, i.e. not that the terms referring to them are synonymous but the terms happen to pick out, refer to or denote one and the same event. George John Romanes who was a neighbor and personal friend of Charles Darwin was a naturalist. He wrote in favour of mind-brain identity in his book “Mind and Motion” where he states: “*Any change taking place in the mind and any corresponding change taking place in the brain are really not two changes but one change*”.

Hilary Putnam, an American philosopher, dilates the basic principle underlying the brain-mind identity theories. According to these theories, the brain is regarded as a machine, and mind is held to be the functions of the brain-machine. If one has to locate the mind, one has to do so by locating the brain functions. The brain functions are to be ascribed to various aspects of the mind.

Murton Hunt, in his book “The Universe Within” writes in favour of brain-mind identity. He does not support the idea that mind is a sort of stuff different from



the brain. It is rather a series of processes of immense complexity, the integration of millions or billions of neural events. The mind is not something apart from the brain, but is the brain's programmes, the brain's total set of symbol manipulations. Hunt regards the brain as phenomenon and mind as epiphenomenon. Accordingly, mental processes which we call thoughts or more broadly mind are secondary or collective effects of the brain's biological processes and thus are epiphenomena.

William Uttal, a psychologist, holds that mind is to the nervous system as a rotation is to the wheel. Rotation is a mass effect of organized movement and not an independently existing thing apart from the wheel and so is mind not separate from the brain. Hunt cites the analogy of digestion and the stomach. Mind is to the brain as digestion is to the stomach: the brain is what **is**, the mind is what the brain **does**. We do not say that digestion is a spirit that inhabits the stomach. "And why then suppose that mind is a spirit or incorporeal stuff that inhabits the brain"?-asks Murton Hunt.

A logical question can be raised that what kind of identity is there? Whether it is a strong or strict sense of identify or a weak sense of identity. In case of a weak or a loose sense of identity, the two are identical or equal. For example-4 is equal to 2+2. But in case of a strong or a strict sense of identity, the Law of Identity maintains that a thing is identical with that thing only. That means mind is identical with the mind and brain is identical with the brain. So mind and brain cannot be identical in the strict sense of identity. It cannot be said that the two are identical in one of the senses.

J.A. Shaffer argues that the identity theory must be rejected on a priori grounds. If mental and brain events were identical, they would have to occur in the same place. But it makes no sense to say of some mental event, a thought for example, that it occurred in some particular part of the brain. Hence the identity cannot hold.

The distinguished neurophysiologist and Nobel Laureate Sir John C. Eccles is a highly vocal advocate of the view that mind exists apart from the brain.²² Sir Karl Popper and Sir John Eccles argue that mind, as associated consciousness, has some control over the brain. They say that mind and brain are separate, with weak, slow acting interaction.²³

Wittgenstein's view

We have already discussed six views regarding the mind-body relationship, none of which is found to be satisfactory. This problem can also be discussed in a new direction, i.e. through the analysis of language. According to Wittgenstein, philosophical problems are never practical problems. Philosophical problems are linguistic problems. Wittgenstein's remark that philosophical problems arise when language goes on a holiday, appears to be true with regard to metaphysical issues. It has also been suggested in many quarters that by exposing the proper conceptual geography of concepts of a field in their logico-linguistic framework, we can gain clarity and arrive at more adequate solutions.

Conclusion

The question is raised, how can we solve the problem in the level of language? Looking into the structure of our language, we can find that there are certain predicates which



may be considered as physical predicates or predicates ascribed to the material objects, as distinguished from the predicates applicable to various states of consciousness. 'M-predicate' and 'P-predicate', the terms used by Strawson, for the physical and the mental predicates are applicable to only one category of subject, i.e. person or individual. M-predicates can be applied to corporeal things, but not to states of consciousness. P-predicates are not applicable to corporeal things. According to Strawson both M- and P-predicates are attributable to an individual. In this sense person, who represents an individual is primitive and also basic in our conceptual framework. Since Strawson has given more emphasis on the concept of a person, we have no problem in relating the two pairs of predicates (M-P predicates), whereas Descartes problem was, mind and body are two pairs of substances. Therefore, we could not relate the two pairs of substances. But Strawson has given a queer solution regarding the mind- body problem in the level of language.

NOTES & REFERENCES

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- ⁴ Ibid., p.285.
- ⁵ Maish, Y. (1999): *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, p.252.
- ⁶ Ibid., p.230.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid., p.249.
- ⁹ Ibid., p.250.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p.251.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid., p.252.
- ¹³ Hospers, J. (1999): *An Introduction to his Philosophy*, Allied Publishers Ltd., New Delhi, p.397.
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- ¹⁵ Ibid., p.398.
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- ¹⁸ Ibid., p.66.
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- ²³ Ibid., p.507.

