

ASPECTS OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Sreekumar Nellickappilly
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
IIT Madras



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Chapter One

Greek Philosophy: An Introduction

Key Words: Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Atomists, naturalists, cosmologists.

This chapter gives an overview of some important features of the Greek civilization, which has laid foundations for the intellectual and creative endeavours of the European civilization. We shall also see some important early contributions to philosophy in this chapter. These include the theories of early Greek thinkers starting from Thales, who is hailed as the father of Western philosophy. These thinkers are called cosmologists or naturalist philosophers as their theories dealt primarily with the fundamental nature of the natural world around us. The two important problems with which they were preoccupied were the problem of the primordial substance and the problem of change.

Before we start examining the philosophical contributions of the early Greek thinkers, we shall have an overview of the Greek civilization and culture that fostered critical, philosophical reflections.

Greek Civilization: A Brief Overview

The Greeks should be credited for developing a civilization in the European world. Yet the origins of this civilization are still surrounded by debates and controversies. According to some historical accounts, the Greeks owe a lot to the oriental world in developing their philosophical views, especially to the Egyptians and to the Babylonians. Even they seem to have borrowed a lot from ancient Indians, who had a very rich philosophical heritage since the Vedic age during 2000-1500 BCE. Many European historians today deny this. But the fact remains that, many of their views about the world, their cosmological assumptions and religious and scientific conceptions about the universe were very similar to those which were held true by these ancient non-western civilizations. Even during its more matured era, the Greek thought exhibits such similarities in approaches and outlook with the oriental world. The materialistic

and nihilistic trends in Greek philosophy have parallels in the Indian school of materialism. Besides, there are many other factors that bring these various ancient civilizations together. But it would be too immature to argue that one has developed out of the other. We may content that there were active interactions among these ancient people, which would have led to the trading off of ideas as well.

For our purpose, we need not go deep into this controversy. But it is important to see and appreciate the similarities and differences to understand the unique features of Western philosophy. We shall do that in the course of our analysis. A historical account of Western philosophy can be conveniently commenced from an analysis of the Greek contributions to the world of ideas. The ancient Greeks have laid foundations, not only for the exercise of philosophical contemplations in the western world, but also for expeditions in the domains of arts, science and other intellectual enquiries.

Many civilizations like Indian and Chinese have much older histories than the Greek world. Their intellectual, spiritual and philosophical traditions were also older. But the Greeks occupy a unique position in human intellectual history because the problems they have raised and the issues they have pondered upon are still being examined and debated by philosophers. In other words, the western intellectual tradition, which the Greeks initiated, is still a living tradition, so much so that, Alfred North Whitehead, a leading thinker of the 20th century philosophy, once remarked that all later philosophies in the west are nothing but footnotes to two of the Greek tradition's most influential and most celebrated thinkers: Plato and Aristotle.

Bertrand Russell observes that, in all history, nothing is so surprising or so difficult to account for as the sudden rise of civilization in Greece. He says that those whom we know as the Greek people came to Greece in three successive waves. From around 2500 B.C. to 1400 B.C. the Minoan culture existed in the island of Crete. This was spread all over the mainland of Greece by around 1600 B.C. The Minoans primarily engaged in commerce and they exhibited well advanced artistic skills. But this civilization could not flourish beyond 999 B.C. during which they were attacked and conquered by the Greek-speaking Mycenaeans.

The Ionians who had adopted the Cretan civilization were followed by the Achaeans who defeated them and they were followed by the Dorians, who ultimately destroyed the Achaean civilization. The Greek civilization which we try to understand—as the birth place of European philosophy—was the result of a blend of these various civilizations and their religious beliefs and their rudimentary philosophical assumptions.

The Greeks gradually evolved a political system which can be termed as a form of **Democracy**, though their version of democracy may lack many of the important features which we consider integral to it today. Broadly it was a system of government by all the citizens, excluding women and slaves. With advancements in agriculture and maritime trading, the Greeks developed a civilization that gradually showed up its fruits through creative works in art, literature and philosophy. They developed a written script after learning the art of writing from the Phoenicians. They undertook serious literary adventures and with the composition of *Iliad and the Odyssey* by Homer between 750 to 550 B.C, writing had touched the peak of its creative potentials. During the 6th century in Greece, science, philosophy and mathematics had already emerged as separate disciplines.

Historians affirm that after the fall of the Mycenaean civilization around 1200 BC, there was a dark age that had separated the early Greek civilization from the later. The Greek and East Mediterranean cities had their origin around 800 BC. Greece was divided into a large number of small independent states, each consisting of a city with some agricultural territory surrounding it. Among the several city states, Athens was the most prominent one. It was a gateway to Asia Minor and had a very good port and a great maritime fleet which it developed by converting its naval force after it fought and won the war with the Persians during 490-470. The cultural interactions made possible by trading enabled their cultural enrichment. Trading necessitated the growth of mathematics and contacts with other civilizations like India and Egypt enabled them to learn mathematics, philosophy and astronomy. Economic prosperity brought leisure and security, which also was an impetus for speculative thinking

The Pre- Socratic Period: General Characteristic Features

This period in Greek history witnessed the emergence of several different schools of philosophy, the prominent among them being the Ionian school, the Pythagoreans, the Eleatic School and the Sophists. The Ionians were preeminently naturalist thinkers and they eventually developed physics. The Pythagoreans developed not only a system of abstract philosophy modeled after the concept of numbers as ultimate realities, but also developed religion and ethics. The Eleatic school developed dialectics, which thereafter had a significant influence on the European mind and with the Sophists who advocated cognitive and moral relativism and individualism, the scientific tendency in Greek intellectual tradition started declining.

Zeller observes that, Pre-Socratic philosophy had arisen from the inclination of natural science to enquire about the essence of the natural phenomena. The early Ionians were cosmologists. Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes were arguably the first thinkers who developed their ideas about the universe by sharing the belief that everything in the universe was made from a primordial material substance.

The early Ionian thinkers were comprised of a number of outstanding thinkers who exhibited remarkable originality in their approaches towards the world around them. Among them, Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes were the prominent ones and Aristotle calls them **the first physiologists** or students of nature. They were also called the naturalists as all of them were preoccupied by the problem of the origin and laws of the physical universe. They all have argued that the world has originated from a primitive substance; the diversity the universe exhibit in terms of its different objects, have actually come from one primordial substance.

Thales, who is reputedly known as the father of western philosophy, held that the whole world has been originated from the primordial substance, which for him was water. Matter in all forms has its origin in water and objects in the universe which have distinct features and qualities ultimately go back to this primordial state. Anaximander followed this path of enquiry, but had stated that the primordial substance is not water but an indefinite, infinite, boundless, and

unlimited substance. His disciple Anaximenes in turn argued that the primordial substance is air.

Heraclitus Empedocles, and Anaxagoras are known as later Ionians and like their predecessors, they too have dealt with issues related to the problem of the origin and nature of the universe. The other significant Ionians who contributed to the development of ancient Greek thought are, the Pythagorians, the Eleatic Schoolmen and the Atomists.

Thales: The Father of Western Philosophy

Most historians of philosophy call **Thales** as the father of western philosophy, though this is not a matter, which is completely free from disputes. But that is not an important concern for us. We learn that Thales was born in the year 640 BC, in Miletus, in Asia Minor and died at the age of 78 and was regarded as one of the seven wise men. He had contacts with the Babylonians and Egyptians from where he had respectively learned astronomy and geometry.

In one sense Thales deserves the title, the **father of western philosophy**, as he was probably the first thinker to adopt a completely rational approach to substantial questions about human reality. He raised the question of primitive causes of things and tried to provide explanations that are free from mythological assumptions. He considered water as the primitive, ultimate substance and held that everything comes out of it and returns to it. He thus adopts a materialistic, scientific, rational and philosophical approach.

Anaximander

Following the approach adopted by Thales, Anaximander, who was a disciple of Thales (not accepted by all historians of philosophy), presented a different view. He held that the fundamental substance cannot be any definite substance like water as Thales supposed, but is an eternal, infinite, boundless and imperishable substance. All qualities of things in the empirical world are derived from it and water itself comes out of this primordial substance. All things in this world come from this great mass of undifferentiated matter. Anaximander differentiates himself from other cosmologists of his age with his emphasis on a substance which is abstract. We may say that, with his doctrine of boundless substance he

has inaugurated a tendency towards an abstract mode of thinking in the history of Greek philosophy, which later became prominent.

Pythagoras

Pythagoras (560-480 BC) is one remarkable thinker, who was also instrumental in developing a peculiar religious approach to reality, apart from his outstanding contributions to mathematics and geometry. He had studied under Thales and later went to Egypt and Mesopotamia, from where he would have perfected his understanding of mathematics. He held that numbers which are abstract, are the ultimate realities. The focus is on the abstract form and relations and Pythagoras had argued that measure, order, proportion and uniform recurrence can be expressed in numbers and therefore, they are the true realities.

Heraclitus and Parmenides: The Problem of Change

Another important problem discussed by these ancient Greek cosmologists was the problem of change. Heraclitus and Parmenides were two important thinkers who held contradictory views with regard to this problem; Heraclitus advocating change and Parmenides permanence.

Heraclitus held that change constitutes the very life of the universe and all permanence we experience is an illusion. Heraclitus has famously stated that, "one cannot step into the same river twice." He held that the entire universe is in a state of ceaseless change and reality is an endless process of becoming. He identified fire as the primordial substance of the universe, as it would symbolize the ceaseless activity that is the principle of the universe. Fire is the vital principle in the organism and the essence of the soul.

Heraclitus affirmed that everything in this world is changed into its opposite and no thing has permanent qualities. According to him every object is a union of opposite qualities and hence there is contradiction and change. If they are not so, the world would have stagnated. Hence, in one sense, everything is both is and is not. He explains harmony as resulting from the union of opposites.

But, this ceaseless change which the universe and its objects undergo, is not arbitrary, but is a law-governed rational process. Heraclitus believed that the logos or reason in things is permanent and therefore, a life based on reason is superior to a sensuous life.

Parmenides, on the other hand advocates permanence and vehemently opposes change and asks, how can a thing can both “be” and “not be”. He wonders how can a thing possess contradicting qualities. How can one quality become another quality? He argues that something cannot come out of nothing and something cannot become nothing. If being is a process of becoming, then it must either have come out of not being or being. If from not being, then it has come from nothing which is impossible. If from being, then it has come from itself and hence is identical with itself.

Parmenides argues that from being only being can come and no thing can become anything else. Hence he concludes that there is only one eternal, underived, unchangeable being, which is immovable and is identical with thought. What cannot be thought cannot be, Parmenides concludes, and what cannot be (not-being) cannot be thought

The Atomists

Atomism is another philosophical theory propagated by some Greek tinkers where ultimate reality has been identified with infinite number of atoms which are simple substances. With this idea the natural-scientific views of the universe developed by the Greek cosmologists reaches another important milestone.

The Atomists conceive the universe as constitutive of fundamental, changeless, eternal substances called atoms. These primordial substances are simple, invisible, impenetrable, indivisible spatial entities. They differ from each other only in form, weight and size and are separated from one another by empty space. They have extension and are physically indivisible and are compact physical units. They are qualitatively alike and being the building stones of reality everything in this world is a combination of atoms and spaces.

The atomists held that motion is inherent in atoms and therefore, they were not in need of any external mythical entities to explain change. But while advocating change they also affirmed that absolute change is impossible, as atoms don't change. Since motion is inherent in atoms and they are always in motion, things in the world, which are constituted of combinations of atoms, are also in constant motion. The atomists thus explain everything in terms of atoms, their motion and combinations.

Early Greek Philosophy: An Assessment

In the endeavours of all these thinkers of early Greek philosophy, one can trace the beginning of rational philosophical and scientific thinking. Russell rightly observes that the Milesian school is important, not for what it achieved, but for what it attempted. They were attempting to explain phenomena by natural causes, independent of mythical accounts. The fundamental question raised by all of them was with regard to the idea of essence. They enquired what the basal substance was and tried to answer in terms of evidence gathered from sense perception. Subsequently they have located the essence of material reality in one of the four basic substances; earth, water, fire and air. They should be credited for not getting entangled with mythological and religious accounts of reality. These bold attempts laid foundations for critical rational thinking in the Greek world.

Nevertheless, not all of these early thinkers were scrupulously rational, as their thoughts were a unique mix of scientific, moral philosophical and religious reflections about the reality around them. Undoubtedly, the early Greek thinkers were influenced by the Babylonians and Egyptians. It was also the beginning of a period of active philosophical contemplations about certain fundamental philosophical questions concerning the nature of the material world. The whole of pre-Socratic philosophy, therefore, was in its aim and content a philosophy of nature.

Quiz

1. Who is the father of western philosophy?
(a) Heraclitus (b) Parmenides (c) Thales (d) Anaximenes
2. Who among the following is a later Ionian thinker?
(a) Thales (b) Anaximander (c) Anaximenes (d) Anaxagoras
3. Who held that the primordial substance is an eternal, infinite, boundless and imperishable substance.
(a) Anaximenes (b) Parmenides (c) Thales (d) Anaximander
4. Who said "one cannot step into the same river twice?"
(a) Heraclitus (b) Parmenides (c) Thales (d) Anaximenes
5. Which among the following is not advocated by the atomists?
(a) Absolute change is impossible (b) Atoms are simple and invisible
(c) Atoms are not extended (d) Motion is inherent in atoms.

Answer Key:

1. (c)
2. (d)
3. (d)
4. (a)
5. (c)

Assignment

1. Discuss the major contributions of the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers.
2. Examine the problem of substance and the problem of change as discussed by early Greek thinkers.

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CHAPTER 2

SOPHISTS AND SOCRATES:

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MAN, RELATIVISM AND THE IDEA OF GOOD

Key Words: Sophists, Gorgias, nihilism, relativism, skepticism. Socrates, Oracle of Delphi.

The Impact of Philosophical Thinking on Greek Civilization

This chapter will introduce the philosophy of the Sophists and in continuation with this the philosophical contributions of Socrates, arguably the most celebrated Greek thinker. This period in the history of Greek philosophy is unique, as it witnessed a shift of focus; from the naturalist approaches of the early cosmologists to a philosophy of man.

The rise of philosophical thinking promoted free thinking and critical examination of all those accepted customs and conventions that were held good for centuries. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the early Greek cosmologists, in spite of their differences, agreed upon certain fundamental assumptions with regard to the nature and goal of philosophy. They all enquired about the fundamental features of the natural world. But what characterized their approach were the critical spirit and the logical rigour they have exhibited while discussing the problems they treated as important. As a result, old conceptions of the world and life, which were entangled with religious and other superstitious beliefs, were replaced by rational and logical explanations and mysticism gave way to science and philosophy. This spirit of free enquiry was ubiquitous as it influenced explorations in other domains of culture like poetry, history and medicine.

The ancient Greek thinkers, no doubt, have laid the foundation for all the subsequent intellectual endeavours pursued by the Europeans in a variety of fields. The philosophies of the cosmologists were followed by the radical skepticism of the Sophists and finally by the emergence of the great metaphysical systems of Plato and Aristotle. This post-cosmologist or post-naturalist phase in Greek thinking, inaugurated by the Sophists, was a period of radical change in many respects. The Sophists have not only

raised new questions and have initiated debates and discussions on many new areas concerning human life, but also adopted new methods and strategies.

The Arrival of the Sophists

The impact of the Sophists on philosophical thinking is so unique, as they were responsible for western philosophy making a major paradigm shift from the naturalist approaches of the early thinkers to the more critical and pragmatic approaches to the reality of the human self. Socrates, who is arguably the most celebrated among the ancient western thinkers, reported to have spent a lot of time arguing with the Sophists on fundamental questions concerning moral philosophy, which occupied a central position in the thinking of ancient Greek philosophers. The Sophists were criticized for their relativism and were severely censured for their disregard for ethical values and propagation of nihilism. But it was this disregard and disrespect that shook some fundamental assumptions of the ancient Greek people, who relied a lot on religious ideas and assumptions for deciding on questions about right conduct and behavior. The Sophists forced a radical change in these unreflective approaches and they waged an uncompromising war against such conformists with their relativism and individualism. The force of their arguments were so significant that even great thinkers like Plato and Aristotle had to respond to them and shape their arguments in response to their critical challenges.

The Sophists for the Greek metaphysical and moral traditions were what the Charvakins were for the ancient Indian metaphysicians. They questioned the meaningfulness and sanctity of the otherworldly and metaphysical assumptions behind moral assumptions, customs and conventions. The Charvakins challenged the very foundations of Vedic morality. Similarly the Sophists ridiculed the foundations of ancient Greek social and individual ethics. As in the case of ancient India, where certain crucial social, political and cultural factors fostered the emergence of the unorthodox and non-

Vedic traditions, certain very important factors encouraged the emergence of Sophism in ancient Greece.

More than any other sphere of life, the impact of the Sophists were on the moral and political domains and the two were so intimately interconnected in ancient Greece. The Sophists belonged to an era where many of the accepted notions about human destiny were critically examined and assumptions about good life are questioned. The critical spirit was part and parcel of the Greek culture from the very beginning, though the religious sentiments too had played an important role in shaping the customs and conventions. In other words, there was no apparent clash between the traditional moral and religious assumptions and the critical spirit. The early Greek thinkers involved in deep critical engagements as each generation produced an original thinker who would oppose and challenge what was held before. But about moral assumptions and conceptions about good life, there were a broad general agreement, as the ancient Indians had about their conceptions about dharma. Though its interpretations and understanding of its details vary, there were some broad fundamental agreements.

As mentioned above, the Sophists have questioned all the accepted customs and conventions. They have insisted on being critical and thinking logically and through their critical engagements have attempted transforming the old conceptions of the world, human destiny and meaning of human life and even questioned the very sanctity of holding such grand conceptions.

Who were the Sophists?

The Sophists were professional educators or walking teachers, who taught young people the art of rhetoric. Many of them made a living out of this and charged their pupil for imparting knowledge and skills. The term Sophistry means practical wisdom and the Sophists were supposed to be imparting the necessary knowledge and skills that enable individuals to succeed in life. They would more explicitly express their disregard to any position that is universally tenable or valid, as they advocated relativism and

individualism that assert that there is no truth that is universally valid. Since they oppose all conceptions of holding a philosophical position, they would not envisage projecting any “theory” which would find acceptance from all. Hence Sophism cannot be treated as a school of thought or an organized movement.

Consequently, the Sophists do not constitute an organized and systematic philosophical movement or tradition of thought. There was no common metaphysical doctrine to which all of them subscribed to, though there were several common features shared by their thoughts. All of them opposed all forms of essentialism; metaphysical or moral and had apparently advocated relativism, subjectivism and occasionally, nihilism.

The emergence of Sophism

Sophism emerged during a period in history when democracy was prevalent in Athens and other city-states. In this scenario, the cultivation of effective public speaking skills was crucial, as that would fetch people a good career in politics and public life. Sophists were teachers who taught rhetoric and other forms of arts and skills that would help people excel in political life by imbibing excellent communication and argumentative skills. Naturally, many intelligent young people who had the desire for power, wealth, fame, efficiency and success were attracted by their teachings and methods. On the one hand, the democratic institutions encouraged independent thought and action and on the other hand, the critical attitude and free thinking encouraged the growth of individualism.

The questions about human destiny have captivated human imagination since long. Like other great civilizations, the Greeks too had their assumptions about this and subsequently have developed and have articulated their conceptions of progress. The growth of philosophical and scientific thinking was an impetus in thinking about these in new ways in rational terms. The emerging rational spirit had also encouraged questioning those religious assumptions that constituted the foundations of morality. The idea that man can fashion his own destiny prompted them to envisage greater role for education and training.

The two most important features of the thinking of the Sophists were their **skepticism** and **relativism**. The skeptical outlook exhibited a doubt on the very possibility of true knowledge on the one hand and refused to accept the unconditional authority of moral law on the other. Consequently, they refuted the prevalent conceptions of objectivity and have attacked the existent religious and other customary values. They endeavoured to demonstrate that the so called universal and objective moral values have not emanated from God: they are human creations.

Gorgias, a prominent figure among the Sophists, advocated nihilism and endeavoured to demonstrate that nothing exists. He declared that if something does exist we cannot know it and even if we can know it we cannot communicate it.

GORGIAS' NIHILISM: NOTHING EXISTS

If something does exist we can not know it

Even if we can know it we can not communicate it

About the gods, I am not able to know whether they exist or do not exist, nor what they are like in form; for the factors preventing knowledge are many

If anything exists, it must be either Being or Not-Being, or both Being and Not-Being.

It cannot be Not-Being, for Not-Being does not exist; if it did, it would be at the same time Being and Not-Being, which is impossible.

It cannot be Being, for Being does not exist. If Being exists, it must be either everlasting, or created, or both.

It cannot be everlasting; if it were, it would have no beginning, and therefore would be boundless.

If it is boundless, then it has no position (would be no where), for if it had position it would be contained in something, and so it would not longer be boundless; for that which contains is greater than that which is contained, and nothing is greater than the boundless.

It cannot be contained by itself, for then the thing containing and the thing contained would be the same, and Being would become two things—both position and body—which is absurd.

If not contained – without position – then it does not exist.

Hence if Being is everlasting, it is boundless

If boundless, it has no position ('is nowhere')

If without position, it does not exist

Gorgias' Philosophical Position

Gorgias was a master of rhetoric and a major advocate of the idea of paradoxical thought and paradoxical expression. He was not primarily a teacher of excellence or virtue like many other Sophists. But his arguments that demonstrated the nihilistic position oppose the theory of Being proposed by Parmenides; where a concept of absolute, boundless single entity was postulated as the absolute reality.

The dominant nihilistic position he adopted forced him to refute moral absolutism and subsequently he believed that there is no absolute notion of excellence or virtue. All such conceptions of moral excellence are relative to the situation and context.

Like many other Sophists, Gorgias was a master rhetoric and held very strong beliefs about the nature and function of language; an aspect of his thought many contemporary philosophers may find interesting. He categorically refuted a representationalist conception of language. More than representing the world of facts, language is capable of doing many things, as it has seductive powers. Hence words have incantatory and narcotic effects on people. One can be trained to employ them in this fashion in order to attain certain objectives. A trained rhetorician can prove any proposition true and we may say something and mean something else.

Sophists like Gorgias could attract many young minds who were aspirants of power, wealth and fame. The youth were attracted to such philosophical positions, which would argue that there is no truth out there and we can make it ourselves. As mentioned above, the Sophists provided training in rhetoric and logical argumentation to the youth with which they could succeed in public life. The Sophists through their methods and

practices have asserted that success is not something that comes as a hereditary right: it can be achieved through skills.

Another notable thinker of this age was Protagoras, to whom the statement, “man is the measure of all things” is attributed. We have seen that, Gorgias was not primarily a teacher of virtue, and was more interested in proving the nihilistic position taking advantage of the seductive powers of language. On the other hand, Protagoras was interested in analyzing issues related to morality and have advocated an extreme form of ethical relativism.

Protagoras’ Philosophy

Protagoras advocated the idea of *dissoi logoi* or different words, that asserts that there are two contradictory sides to every issue. His arguments and approaches reflected the spirit of this primary assumption and he trained his students to see both these sides and argue accordingly. He tried to show that through the employment of such techniques one could make the weaker cause appear the stronger.

As mentioned above, the famous statement, “Man is the measure of all things” is associated with Protagoras. With this he categorically affirms the following:

1. There is no absolute truth, which can be held universally by all men.
2. There are no absolutely and universally correct moral positions or criterion, apart from the individual who acts and takes decisions.
3. There is no extra-human reality that decides the values of human life; the individual man decides it for him.

The Individualism of Protagoras

The statement “man is the measure of all things” asserts relativism and individualism. It contains a refutation of all objective and universal criterion, as the focus is on the individual man and not on the abstract human nature or on the universal rational faculty in all men. The focus is on the individual knower and it affirms that all knowledge

depends on the particular knower. Consequently, there is no objective truth as what is true to me is true to me and this may not be so to others. The extreme form of individualism advocated by Protagoras makes the Individual a law unto himself on matters of knowledge and value.

The Impact of Sophism

The Sophists advocated nihilism, Individualism and relativism and asserted that there are no objective truth and knowledge. There are only subjective opinions and they saw no reason for conforming to any universal position. According to them all positions are equally true.

With this relativism and nihilism they have refuted the rational and foundationalist tradition of the Greek thought. The Greek foundationalist thinking broadly assumes the world as rationally ordered by laws that could be discovered by reason and observation. They believed that the laws of that cosmos could be discovered by the application of individual reason. The Greeks simultaneously developed a tradition of argumentation that exhibited a quest for discovering truth.

The Sophists countered all these assumptions and have advocated ethnocentric and subjective views. Consequently they have advocated relativism and individualism. The domain of morality was severely affected by this relativism and the Sophists have questioned all the objective and foundational moral theories that projected certain moral values as universally valid. The Sophists held that morality is nothing more than conventions and have questioned the validity of all accepted assumptions.

The foundationalist tradition of Greek thought assumed that moral laws are like laws of nature and are universally true for all humans. They have also maintained that the universal moral law can be understood by reason. Countering this position, the Sophists

have argued that the moral laws are created by man based on circumstances and they have no independent objective existence. They vary from time to time and place to place and even from individual to individual.

According to the Sophists moral values and laws are conventional and they often reflect the will of those who have the power to enforce their demands on others. They held that moral rules are contrary to nature, as they are made by the weak, the majority, in order to restrain the strong who is a minority. Natural right is the right of the stronger.

If we raise the question of justice in this context, the implications of Sophists' views become clear. They advocate the principle, "might is right" and argues that it is accident that makes might. Plato's *The Republic*, discusses the argument that explains the origin of justice by the Sophists. They argue that to do injustice is, by nature, good and to suffer injustice, evil. But in such cases, evil is always greater than the good. Plato writes:

And so when men have both done and suffered injustice and have had experience of both, not being able to avoid the one and obtain the other, they think that they had better agree among themselves to have neither; hence there arise laws and mutual covenants; and that which is ordained by law is termed by them lawful and just. [The Republic by Plato: Book II Glaucon]

The gist of the argument is the following. The origin and nature of justice can be traced to this idea of a compromise or a mean between the best of all and the worst of all. The best of all is to do injustice and not be punished, and the worst of all, is to suffer injustice without the power of retaliation. Justice needs to be understood as a middle point between the two. It is tolerated not as a good, but as the lesser evil, and honoured by reason of the inability of men to do injustice. The Sophists argue that no sane person would ever submit to such an agreement if he were able to resist.

On the positive side, the Sophists have advocated hedonism and affirmed that the Good Life IS the Pleasurable Life. If this maxim is true, then injustice is more profitable than justice (provided one could get away with that). The Sophists most people would take advantage of their neighbors if they were certain they would get away with it.

The Contributions of the Sophists

The Sophists are credited for bringing philosophy down from heaven to the dwellings of men. Philosophers before them were preoccupied with the natural world, its workings, its essence etc. The Sophists turned attention from external nature to man himself and with their skepticism and nihilism have exposed some longstanding conventions and beliefs about the possibility of objective universal knowledge. With this focus on man and their constant questioning of the existent assumptions about knowledge they have prompted philosophers to take questions about knowledge—theory of knowledge—seriously.

Again, with their radical criticism of foundationalism and propagation of relativism, they have added a different dimension to moral reflections. Their criticism has exposed the weakness of the foundations of morality which enjoyed infallible status and it had eventually led to more profound reflections in the field of ethics and morality by many thinkers including Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. They have also forced more studies in the field of political philosophy and have prompted philosophers to explore deeply the problems related to theories of justice and state, on authority and laws of the state etc.

The Drawbacks

The Sophists have initiated more free and critical approaches to philosophical reflections by adopting a completely unorthodox approach and methodology. But with their emphasis on individualism, they have failed to see the universal element in man. One may note that they were exaggerating the differences in human judgements and in this process were ignoring the agreements and similarities. They have magnified the accidental, subjective and personal elements in human knowledge and neglected the commonalities and similarities.

The critique of traditional morality collapsed into subjectivism and individualism and further to pure selfishness and moral anarchy. The radical moral skepticism and individualism further promoted disrespect and disobedience to the law, and has ultimately

led to a complete neglect of civic duty, and encouraged selfish individualism. With their stress on selfish interests of the individual over the general welfare of the society, the philosophical outlook of the Sophists posed a threat to community life.

The Next Step Forward: The Socratic Method

There was a mixed response to Sophists' approaches, methods and philosophical outlook. The Sophists were trained rhetoricians and it was not easy to refute their views. But no civilization can ignore the importance of maintaining a respect for civil law, state authority and public welfare and hence it was an imperative to have them countered effectively. Plato through his famous Dialogues takes up this responsibility and Plato's Socrates wages an uncompromising war against the relativism and nihilism advocated by the Sophists.

Socrates considered himself as a gadfly and also an intellectual midwife, and conceived and perfected a method—the method of dialectic—in order to restore faith in human reason and foundational concepts in moral reasoning.

It is believed that once the Oracle of Delphi, which is believed to be the representative of the Gods have pronounced that Socrates is the wisest among all the Greeks. Socrates wondered what qualified him to be considered as the wisest among all; as he himself knew that he knew hardly anything. He then concluded that, this insight—that he knows that he does not know anything—is the highest knowledge that makes him the wisest of all. This story has an important message. It tells us that highest knowledge belongs only to the Gods and all human beings have only finite intelligence and hence possess only finite knowledge.

At the same time, Socrates ventured to counter the Sophists by questioning them on their assumptions and beliefs. He used to pick up conversations with the so-called learned scholars and would ask them questions pretending that he was completely ignorant about the topic under discussion. He would force them to answer his questions

and gradually make them commit contradictions. The opponent soon realizes that, actually Socrates is under control of the situation. This is known as Socratic irony.

The purpose of this method is to bring out contradictions hidden in one's thinking that are manifested in one's assumptions, beliefs and views. Socrates is compared with a gadfly, because with his constant questions he makes his opponent uncomfortable, who otherwise does not feel the necessity of his long held beliefs need to be questioned or revised. This is what a gadfly does to the horse. It flies around the horse and makes it uncomfortable.

Socrates is also known as an intellectual midwife. The job of a midwife is to help the woman in pain to deliver the child. Similarly, Socrates assists people to arrive at correct knowledge, which the human soul already possesses. The underlying assumption is that the human soul already possesses all knowledge in advance, which as a result of it coming into contact with the body, it has forgotten. The dialectical method helps us to introspect about this knowledge, encounter confusions and contradictions and finally overcome them by arriving at right definitions of concepts.

It is Plato who systematically develops these insights and in his Dialogues, Socrates has been presented as the Protagonist, who engages with others in conversations and arguments. Socrates would have attracted the wrath of many people in this process that ultimately had led to his arrest and execution. The next chapter discusses the important contributions of Plat's Philosophy.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is not true of the Sophists?
(a) Disregard for ethical values (b) Propagated nihilism (c) Advocated objectivism (d) Questioned all the accepted customs and conventions.
2. What does the term Sophistry means?
(a) Practical wisdom (b) Rhetorical argument (c) Logical reasoning
(d) Universal wisdom
3. Which of the following is not associated with Gorgias?

- (a) Representationalist conception of language (b) Nihilism (c) Idea of paradoxical thought and paradoxical expression (d) Refutation of moral absolutism.
- 4. Protagoras' interest in man focuses on:
 - (a) Abstract human nature (b) Universal rational faculty in all men (c) Humanity as a whole (d) The individual man.
- 5. Which is not an assumption of the Greek foundationalist thinking?
 - (a) The world is rationally ordered (b) Universal moral law can be understood by reason (c) Moral laws are like laws of nature (d) Moral laws vary from time to time and place to place.

Answer Key

- 1. (c)
- 2. (a)
- 3. (a)
- 4. (d)
- 5. (d)

Assignment

- 1. Discuss how did the Sophists challenge the Greek moral tradition.
- 2. Describe intellectual midwifery.

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Chapter Three

Plato's Idealism

Key words: Idealism, theory of ideas, eternal essences, parable of the cave.

This chapter will introduce the important features of the idealistic philosophy of the ancient Greek thinker, Plato, who was a disciple of Socrates and the teacher of another celebrated philosopher, Aristotle. This chapter will discuss the following topics.

Plato's Idealism: An overview

Plato, arguably the greatest metaphysician of European philosophy, was born in Athens in a noble family in about 427 BC. He was educated by Cratylus, who was a disciple of Heraclitus and Euclides of Megara. With the latter he studied the philosophy of Parmenides, whose conception of permanent, unchangeable and imperishable substance. He then became the disciple of Socrates, who remained till the end, as a source of great intellectual inspiration in his life. He belonged to a period in Greek philosophy, which had witnessed the emergence of many novel ideas, to which he too had actively contributed. An equally important thinker of this age was his own disciple Aristotle, who incidentally was his greatest critic as well. In terms of influence, both these thinkers have stimulated generations of thinkers across continents. Bertrand Russell in his *A History of Western Philosophy* observes:

Plato and Aristotle were the most influential of all philosophers, ancient, medieval, or modern; and of the two, it was Plato who had the greater effect upon subsequent ages. I say this for two reasons: first, that Aristotle himself is an outcome of Plato; second, that Christian theology and philosophy, at any rate until the thirteenth century, was much more Platonic than Aristotelian. (p. 104)

In his philosophical theory, Plato had advocated an uncompromising idealism which asserted that the experiential world (empirical reality) is fundamentally unreal and is a mere appearance and ultimate reality is constitutive of abstract universal essences of things. This can be elaborated with a simple example. The individual cats in this universe are unreal, but the essence of cat or cattiness is real and imperishable. Everything that exists in the empirical world is therefore unreal, as they are all particular concrete objects. The universals alone are real and they are

abstract essences of things. The objects of this world are mere copies of these abstract universal essences.

The problem of universals has always posed problems to philosophers. In ordinary language, the universals consist of what is the common element in the many particular objects that bear the same name. As long as they are treated as something the mind abstracts from day to day experience of common objects, they do not pose any specific philosophical perplexities. But when philosophers attempt to project them as possessing a reality independent of the objects experienced, they become metaphysically significant and need to be accounted for. This is precisely what Plato did. According to him, they are not only independent of concrete objects, but the latter are dependent on them; they are absolute realities.

Positing universals as independent realities raise certain other issues. We may then wonder what would be the relationship between particulars and universals. Again, what happens to the universals when particulars perish? We know the particular objects through perception. But what would be the method by which we know the universals? Can man ever know reality? Plato's idealism addresses all these questions and tries to answer them with a comprehensive philosophical system that relates a theory of reality with a theory of knowledge and a theory of ethics.

Influences on Plato

Plato was indebted to many of his predecessors in the history of philosophy. He was influenced by **Pythagoras**, as the latter too had immense respect for mathematics and was subscribed to a theory of abstract realities. Plato shared with Pythagoras a mystic outlook that believed in immortality and other-worldliness. **Parmenides** was another thinker who influenced Plato when he developed his theory of eternal and timeless reality, which conceived change as fundamentally unreal. But **Heraclitus**, another Eleatic thinker, who interestingly held a position that is diametrically opposite to Parmenides' view by famously advocating the impermanence thesis, "one cannot step into the same river twice", too had

influenced Plato, as the latter had affirmed that there is nothing permanent in the sensible world. This impermanent status of the sensible reality led him to suspect the testimony of the senses in the acquisition of knowledge.

The most important influence on Plato's intellectual and personal lives was exerted by **Socrates** from whom he has borrowed the technique of dialectics and further developed it into a systematic philosophical method. Socrates too considered the ethical problem as the most significant philosophical issue and has also inspired Plato for developing teleological rather than mechanical explanations of the world. Socrates has placed the philosophical and moral problems concerning the question of right living at the center. The practical task of philosophy according to him was to help man to think right in order that they may live right. It is important that one should know what is good so that one becomes good. In this sense the questions of knowledge, truth and goodness are intimately connected in the central philosophical question Socrates raised.

Socrates has also placed the domain of truth as the domain of absolute clarity, absolute certainty and absolute universality. It is very important that we should distinguish truth from the confused and vague opinions and thoughts we have. It is natural that human beings may hold different views about things. But despite such differences, we may be able to arrive at common ground or principles and finally reach the truth which can be expressed in universal judgements that are beyond all doubts and contradictions.

The Socratic Method

Socrates employed a unique method of argumentation for eliciting truth. He enters into conversation with a person on a topic and initially pretends knowing very less about it. He proceeds by asking questions and insists for clear definitions and explanations from his partner (not opponent). In this process he makes his partner contradict, as such persistent questioning will expose their confusions. Very soon they realize that Socrates is the master of the situation.

Plato later developed this technique into a systematic philosophical method and his dialogues actually demonstrate how it works as an effective method of

eliciting truth through rational argumentation. Plato deals with a variety of themes in his dialogues, which have Socrates as the protagonist, who ceaselessly engages in conversation with others. All of them follow the same method which emphasizes on conversation and dialogue.

Theory of Forms/Ideas

Gilbert Ryle makes an interesting observation about Plato's theory of ideas. He says that it originated out of several different and partly independent features of the general ideas or notions that constituted the recurrent themes of dialectical disputations that include definitions, standards of measurement and appraisal, immutable things, timeless truths, one over many, intellectual knowledge, conceptual certainties, and ontology of forms.

Bertrand Russell states that, Plato's theory of ideas is partly logical and partly metaphysical. It is logical, as it deals with the meaning of general words like manness, catyness etc. it is metaphysical as it projects an ontology of essences which is constituted of a domain of reality corresponding to the general world we experience. About the logical part, Russell elaborates:

The logical part has to do with the meaning of general words. There are many individual animals of whom we can truly say "this is a cat." What do we mean by the word "cat"? Obviously something different from each particular cat. An animal is a cat, it would seem, because it participates in a general nature common to all cats.....something which is not this or that cat, but some kind of universal cattyness. This is not born when a particular cat is born, and does not die when it dies. In fact, it has no position in space or time; it is "eternal." This is the logical part of the doctrine.

The Metaphysical part of the Theory of Ideas is explicated as:

The word "cat" means a certain ideal cat, "*the* cat," created by God, and unique. Particular cats partake of the nature of the cat, but more or less imperfectly; it is only owing to this imperfection that there can be many of them. The cat is real; particular cats are only apparent.

According to Plato, the ideas are objects of the intellect, known by reason alone and are objective realities that exist in a world of their own. Russell observes that there are as many ideas as there are common names and every common name designates an idea. Let us consider some common examples. Socrates, Parmenides and Heraclitus are all men. Here what is common is the fact that they are all men. What is common to all of them is the man-type, the essence or idea of man, which according

to Plato is an objective reality that exists in an independent ontological domain. Again, we see several beautiful things around us; beautiful flower, beautiful poem, beautiful painting etc. In such cases, we can isolate the idea of beauty as an essence. In the examples of a moving car, moving man, moving cycle, motion is the idea. Plato asserts that all these ideas exist in an abstract universal realm of essences, which alone is real. All the particular objects, events and instances of these ideas are therefore unreal and are mere appearances.

Plato's theory of universal essences now raises another important question. In our normal experience, we see beautiful things, but not , beauty as such, we see moving bodies, not the Idea of movement. We may wonder where do these generalizations, which re essences exist? Do they exist only in the minds of the individual knower? If yes, then what objectivity and universality can they have?

Plato affirms that the general ideas can be approached only through reason, as they are not perceived by the senses. One has to properly employ one's reason to comprehend the ideas, which are real, and for this purpose, reason needs to be properly trained. The philosopher knows that the world of senses is a constantly fleeting realm of entities which cannot be considered as real in the absolute sense of the term; that which is universal, imperishable and transcendental. Reality is changeless and eternal and hence it needs to be searched not in the world of senses, but in the intelligible world.

Plato here challenges the commonly held views about sense objects and general ideas, which assume that they are mental copies of the sensible objects. According to this latter view, general ideas, which are copies, depend on the objects. Moreover, they are not real but exist only in the individual's mind and hence cannot be communicated completely. Countering this perspective Plato affirms that ideas are the models or the originals and individual objects are the copies.

Plato holds that the real must be more stable and static and hence they must be eternal. On the other hand, individual objects and instances may come and go and they are not real. The Idea is what the individual expresses and without the idea it expresses, the individual cannot exist. The idea is an absolute entity and is completely independent of the mind, which has it. The sensible objects are copies of these Ideas, as they partake of the universal Idea.

The objects of the phenomenal world are therefore, subject to change and destruction and are not absolute realities. They depend on time, place and the person who experience them. In other words, everything in the world of phenomenal beauty is relative, fleeting, and uncertain. On the other hand, the essences or Ideas are ever-lasting, as they have neither beginning nor end. They are neither subjected to any changes, nor are they relative to any external factor. They are real transcendental realities.

In other words, the ideas are absolutely real entities, which are more real than the objects of empirical experience. Plato holds that, they alone can be real, being the eternal patterns after which the things of sense are made. On the other hand, the phenomenal world and its objects have a borrowed existence, as they are mere copies of the world of Ideas. They receive their reality from Ideas. They exist, not in themselves, but as reflections of their Ideas. They have no reality other than that which they receive from these Ideas.

Plato further argues that the ideal world exhibits a hierarchical arrangement. He compares this arrangement with the kind of arrangement seen in the sensible world. Things in the empirical world are arranged in such a manner that from the most imperfect to the most perfect there is a gradation. A similar kind of gradation is exhibited by the Ideal world as well. They too are ordered from lower to higher, the higher ones embracing the lower ones and finally the everything is embraced under the highest, the most powerful Idea or the Good.

Therefore, Platonic idealism asserts that the idea of Good is the only real and absolute Idea. It comprehends, contains, or summarizes the entire reality. But if this is the case, what about the reality of these so-called lower Ideas? In the absolute sense, they are less real than the Idea of Good and hence cannot claim absolute status and do not exist in themselves. Therefore, their absolute status is relative to the objects which are their copies and hence depend on them. Compared to the Idea of Good, their existence is only relative and hence they are only modes of the idea of Good. Another important feature of the Ideal world is its organic unity. Despite the hierarchical ordering the ideas exhibit an organic unity and live a common life. It is not possible to separate them from each other as they are independent of time and space, which are principles of separation.

Plato ultimately situates these ideas in the intelligence. They exist, neither in the physical world, not in the human minds. Metaphorically they are placed in the heavens, but in reality the home of the Ideas is the Idea as such. It cannot have a place outside of itself and it exists by virtue of itself in the intelligence, in the mind and form the very essence of the mind. Plato says that they are latent in the mind in such a way that we are not conscious of them initially.

Now the questions are the following. If they are latent in the mind, then the mind must know them always. Then what is the source of error and mistakes? Again, do we get an access to them in our sensations, as they are apparently the only sources of all our knowledge? Plato categorically denies the possibility of accessing the ideas through the senses. The senses can access only the external copies of Ideas and the originals exist in us. Plato argues that the sensations can only provoke Ideas and they cannot produce them. Moreover, the senses are fundamentally deceptive. They drag the mind to the world of particularities and real truth can be accessed only through reasoning.

It is relevant to mention about Plato's concept of matter in this context where we are discussing the reality of the material world. According to Plato, matter is essentially non-being. The Idea becomes a creator, a cause, a will in reference to non-being and what is essentially non-being becomes like being and takes part in the absolute existence of the Idea.

In order to explicate his extremely complex theory of reality Plato introduces the famous Parable of the Cave. It basically says the story of people who remain ignorant about the real world and live in the inferior world of sense objects, thinking that it is reality. Plato compares such ignorant people to the prisoners in a cave. These prisoners are chained and are only able to look in one direction; to their front. They have a fire behind them and a wall in front. Between them and the wall there is nothing; all that they see are shadows of themselves, and of objects behind them, cast on the wall by the light of the fire.

These prisoners, who have never seen anything else but only the shadows, think that these shadows as real. They have no idea about reality. At last one man succeeds in escaping from the cave to the light of the sun. Initially he feels shocked, seeing the sun and the objects in daylight and gradually comes in terms with the state of affairs. He then realizes that he had hitherto been deceived by shadows.

Plato says that if he thinks that it is his duty to help his fellow-prisoners also to escape from the prison-house. He thus becomes a guardian; the ruler of the people, who leads them to truth and enlightenment.

In this parable, the prison and chains symbolize our body and the senses respectively. They prevent us from accessing the truth—the world of ideas—as they drag us to the world of sensible objects, which are mere shadows of the real ideas. The Sun in the parable stands for enlightenment and wisdom. One who is enlightened would comprehend the reality of the world.

Plato further introduces the analogy of vision in order to clarify the theory of ideas further. He explains the difference between clear intellectual vision and the confused vision of sense-perception. When there is sufficient Sunlight objects are revealed to us clearly. During twilight we have blurred vision and in darkness, nothing is revealed. Here the eye stands for the soul and the Sun which is the source of light, symbolizes wisdom which consists in accessing truth or goodness. Darkness symbolizes the state of complete ignorance and twilight represents confused vision. Plato takes up this parable because, sight is different from the other senses as it requires not only the eye and the object, but also light. It categorically states that we have access to the world of ideas only when there is enlightenment and the world of passing things is a confused twilight world.

Quiz

1. According to Plato, Ideas or essences are:
(a) Mental copies of the sensible objects (b) Exist in the individual's mind
(c) Absolutes and are independent of the mind (d) Are representatives of objects
2. Who among the following is a later Ionian thinker?
(a) Thales (b) Anaximander (c) Anaximenes (d) Anaxagoras
3. Who held that the primordial substance is an eternal, infinite, boundless and imperishable substance?
(a) Anaximenes (b) Parmenides (c) Thales (d) Anaximander
4. Who said "one cannot step into the same river twice?"
(a) Heraclitus (b) Parmenides (c) Thales (d) Anaximenes
5. Which among the following is not advocated by the atomists?
(a) Absolute change is impossible (b) Atoms are simple and invisible (c) Atoms are not extended (d) Motion is inherent in atoms.

Answer Key:

1. (c)

2. (d)
3. (d)
4. (a)
5. (c)

Assignment

1. Discuss the major contributions of the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers.
2. Examine the problem of substance and the problem of change as discussed by early Greek thinkers.

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Chapter Four

Plato's Theory of Knowledge

Key Words: knowledge as recollection, Parable of the cave, cave analogy, eye-analogy, flux, dialectical method, intellectual midwifery,

The previous chapter has examined Plato's theory of ideas, which constitutes his metaphysical theory. We have seen that Plato posits a separate realm for accommodating his real essences or Ideas, a world of ideas, where the Ideas are hierarchically ordered. He refuses to grant any value to the world of sense experience. But if sense experience cannot be trusted, then how do we comprehend the ideal essences? In this context, Plato introduced the dialectical method, which is a method of thinking in concepts and arriving at final definitions about concepts by means of which we think.

But, interestingly, this method presupposes that the soul already possesses all knowledge and dialectical method only helps us to "recollect" them. Plato thus seems to be arguing that, "all knowledge is recollection." Hence his theory of knowledge presupposes a unique theory of the soul, where the latter is conceived as eternal. This chapter focuses on these problems.

Plato in *The Republic*, narrates an incident where Socrates is engaged in a conversation with Glaucon.

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: --Behold! human beings living in a underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various

materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners. Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

Here the cave symbolizes the human body and the chains are the senses through which we get knowledge about the sensible world. Plato argues that, since the senses can only give knowledge about the objects of the fleeting empirical world, and not about the world of Ideas or essences, they fail to give us any knowledge at all. We may have only opinions about the sensible objects, which are bound to be confused.

The Parable of the Cave is about those people who are ignorant and live in the inferior world of sense objects and they are compared to prisoners in a cave who are chained and hence are only able to look in one direction. They have a fire behind them, a wall in front and between them. On the front wall they see their own shadows and the shadows of objects behind them and think that these shadows are real, as they have no idea about reality. The body conditioned by the senses (cave and chains) prevents the intellect from having an access to the

reality of things. He sees only the sensible objects and considers them as real. The cave imagery suggests that they are actually shadows and not real.

But one man who escapes the cave and comes out sees the sun and the objects around him in the sunlight. Initially he finds it difficult to comprehend the real state of affairs. But gradually he comes into grip with reality. The sun here stands for enlightenment or wisdom, which reveals absolute reality to the intellect. The man who escapes the cave now realizes that he had been deceived by shadows. Plato says that, if such a man who had truth realization thinks that it is his duty to help his fellow-prisoners also to escape from the cave (body and senses), then he is a philosopher or guardian, the ruler of the people. Plato's theory thus connects the metaphysical theory with an epistemology that answers the questions; what is knowledge? How do we get genuine knowledge? What are the genuine objects of knowledge? He not only distinguishes knowledge from opinion, but also separates the objects of knowledge from the objects of opinion.

Such a distinction is against our common understanding of the distinction between knowledge and opinion. As Russell says, we can form an opinion about something and can also have knowledge about the same thing. Russell gives an example for this. He says that, if I think it is going to snow, then that is an opinion. But if later I see it snowing, that is knowledge. Here the subject-matter is the same on both occasions. This is contrary to Plato's view, which considers knowledge and opinion as dealing with different subject-matters. For Plato knowledge is possible only about ideas and about particular, sensible appearances we can form only opinions.

From the analogy of vision, Plato derives another argument to support his theory of knowledge. Where there is normal light, we see things clearly. In twilight, things appear ambiguous and unclear and in darkness, nothing is seen. In this analogy, the eye symbolizes the soul, which knows the reality, sun is the source of light and hence it symbolizes truth or goodness and wisdom. Twilight stands for confused vision and darkness for ignorance. This analogy is employed in order to explain the difference between clear intellectual vision and the confused vision of sense-perception. The eye analogy is crucial because sight is

different from the other senses, as it requires not only the eye and the object, but also light.

Plato categorically asserts that there is nothing worthy to be called knowledge to be derived from the senses as they reveal only appearances or copies of the essences. Knowledge about the essences is the real knowledge which can be captured by the intelligence only through concepts. This position evidently amounts to a complete rejection of perceptual knowledge.

Refutation of Perceptual Knowledge

Plato holds that the perceptual world is in a constant flux. Here he agrees with Heraclitus who affirmed that one cannot step into the same river twice. The objects undergo constant change and the perceptual world is a world that is in a process of becoming. Therefore, perception deals with knowledge of what becomes and not of what is. It fails to capture the true being of things. The Cave analogy had made this clear. The senses reveal only the shadows, the unreal copies of the real and substantial Forms, which are revealed only to the intellect in pure rational reflection.

In perception, both the subject and the object undergo rapid changes. Change in the percipient causes the change in the percept. Hence perceptual knowledge itself cannot remain changeless. This implies that nothing is fixed and everything is in a process of constant flux and hence uncertain. Plato in his *Theaetetus* examines the nature of perception. In his conversation with Theaetetus, who is a student of mathematics, Socrates enquires what is knowledge? The initial answers given by Theaetetus were not satisfactory, as Socrates went on insisting on clear and accurate definitions of terms and concepts employed. Here Theaetetus presents three definitions of knowledge.

1. Knowledge is perception.
2. Knowledge is true belief.
3. Knowledge is true belief with an account.

Socrates refutes all these accounts. The first account says that knowledge is perception and this insight is connected with the philosophy of two other thinkers: Protagoras and Heraclitus. If we identify perception with knowledge, we have to deal with the perception of all kinds and by all types; the perception of men, animals, mad men, dream perception etc. Again, if we follow Heraclites'

principle, “one cannot step into the same river twice”, we cannot make any assertion about anything, as things undergo rapid changes preventing us from fixing their meaning.

Russell presents an interesting account of the refutation of perceptual knowledge. He says that we perceive through eyes and ears, rather than with them. He points out that, there are certain things that are not connected with any sense organ. He cites the example of knowledge about existence and non-existence. There is no special organ for accessing knowledge about existence and non-existence, likeness and unlikeness, sameness and differences, unity and numbers in general, honourable and dishonourable, and good and bad. In such cases the mind plays a very crucial role. It contemplates some things through its own instrumentality, others through the bodily faculties. Russell adds that, though we perceive hard and soft through touch, it is the mind that judges that they exist and that they are contraries. Only the mind can reach existence, asserts Russell, and we cannot reach truth if we do not reach existence.

Plato's theory thus advances the thesis that claims that knowledge consists in and is the result of intellectual reflection and sense perceptions or impressions are not only the source of invalid knowledge, but are misleading and confusing. Perception cannot result in the intellectual comprehension and hence in knowledge. It cannot foster the apprehension of truth, since it has no role in apprehending the true existence of ideas or essences. Plato thus insists that, in order to access reality and truth that consist of essences and thereby gain knowledge, we have to go beyond sense perception and thereby, beyond the world of particulars.

The Dialectical Method

This intellectual comprehension of the universal idea from the scattered particulars is done by the formation of concepts. The mind has to classify concepts by relating, combining, comparing, dividing, synthesizing and analyzing them. The dialectical method has been introduced in order to make this possible. It is the method of thinking by means of concepts. As a methodology, it was originally employed by Socrates, who through conversations with people

practiced the art of eliciting truth with incessant questioning and uncompromising insistence on definitions of terms.

However, the dialectical method presupposes certain things. It cannot be applied in all contexts and cases. For example, to get any factual information about the world, we may not apply the dialectical method. Only when the objective is to grasp the essences we need to employ them.

Presuppositions of Dialectical Method

The dialectical method primarily assumes that the real is immortal and imperishable and hence genuine knowledge is about knowledge of essences that are eternal and imperishable. The dialectical method further affirms that, since the knowledge about these imperishable essences is neither known through the senses, not does the soul have any other means by which it knows about it, the human soul must be already in possession of it. Plato's philosophy assumes that the soul must be immortal and it already has knowledge about reality, which it has forgotten due to its association with the body and the senses, which function as cave and chains. The dialectical method thus aims at a recollection of these already known truths, by enabling the soul to rise beyond the confusing particulars.

Since knowledge consists in the recollection of already known truths, the dialectical method is expected to foster this process. Socrates was compared to a midwife, and his approach was known as intellectual midwifery. Like a midwife who assists the woman in delivering the child she bears in her body, the intellectual midwife, through constant questioning and argumentation, assists us to gain genuine knowledge, which our soul already possesses, but has forgotten due to our association with the body and senses. The dialectical method which as mentioned above, is a method of thinking in concepts, where we ultimately recollect what we already know. It fosters this process by removing all confusions and bringing in the necessary clarity in our thinking process. It thus aims at capturing the essences of things, which are not revealed in sense perception. Socrates pretends that he does not know anything and asks questions. In this process, he exposes the confusions and contradictions of his opponents and forces them to commit contradictions. Hence the process is actually a process of clarifying thoughts.

Plato's Republic, Book I depicts an argument between Socrates and Thrasymachus, who was a Sophist in Athens. The topic of the dialogue is the concept of justice. Thrasymachus, in a style typical of the Sophists, argues that justice is the interest of the stronger and affirms that might is right. He argues that the government, the rich and the powerful can make and change laws, ordinary people cannot. Socrates challenges this definition and tries to prove Thrasymachus wrong.

As mentioned above the basic assumptions are (a) the soul is immortal (b) the soul already possesses all knowledge (c) all knowledge is recollection (d) Socrates is an intellectual midwife who helps others to arrive at right knowledge about reality.

Plato's theory of knowledge argues for the fundamental separation of the soul from the body; a dualism that played a crucial role in his epistemology. The soul is the abode of pure ideas or abstract essences, while the body with the senses drags us to the world of perishable particular objects. Men are deceived by the senses, tempted by the temporary sensual pleasures and the result is the confused vision comparable to the one we have in twilight. Clear intellectual vision is possible only when we free ourselves from the temptations of sensual experience. Plato urges for this liberation, which philosophers achieve with careful intellectual pursuits. The philosopher should not be a slave to ordinary pleasures and should not care for fleeting worldly pleasures. On the other hand, he must be entirely concerned with the soul, which is immortal. The philosopher should try to free the soul from its communion with the body, as the latter is a hindrance in the acquisition of genuine knowledge.

This amounts to a conclusive rejection of empirical knowledge. Plato's epistemology thus strongly advocates a scheme of dichotomies where he fundamentally distinguishes appearance from reality, particulars from the universal essence, sensible objects from ideas, perception from reason, opinions from genuine knowledge and finally the body from the soul. Plato proposes a tripartite theory of the soul, where it is conceived as constitutive of three basic aspects; the rational, the spirited and the appetitive. The rational aspect is characterized by wisdom and knowledge, the spirited by valor, energy and courage and the appetitive by temperance. Plato argues that, though these three

aspects are features of all human souls, the dominant aspect determines the kind of man someone is. The rational aspect is dominant among people who are guardians of the society. They possess the wisdom that is required for planning and decision making at the state level. Plato's Republic is thus ruled by experts. The soldiers are those in whom the spirited aspect dominates and hence they exhibit the courage required for protecting the society from enemies. The appetitive aspect dominates in the tradesmen.

Plato's Republic is thus an ideal state which is ruled by the Guardians, protected by the soldiers and supported by the tradesmen.

Quiz

1. Dialectical method is not:
(a) A method of thinking in concepts (b) A method by which we arrive at final definitions about concepts (c) Method by means of which we recollect what we already know (d) Method by which we validate our sense experience.
2. In the analogy of vision twilight stands for :
(a) Confused knowledge (b) Ignorance (c) Wrong apprehension (d) Wisdom
3. Why according to Plato, does perceptual knowledge cannot remain changeless?
(a) The reality is in constant flux (b) Change in the percipient causes the change in the percept (c) Perception depends on a world that changes (d) All of the above
4. Which of the following is not true for the dialectical method?
(a) Aims at genuine knowledge that is about essences (b) Enables human soul to gain knowledge through the senses (c) Aims at a recollection of already known truths (d) Aims to capture the universals.
5. Which is not a presupposition of Platonic theory of knowledge?
(a) The soul is immortal (b) Rejection of empirical knowledge (c) All knowledge is recollection (d) Genuine knowledge is possible about the world of sensible objects.

Answer Key:

1. (d)
2. (a)
3. (b)
4. (b)
5. (d)

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Chapter Five

Aristotle's Criticism of Platonic Idealism and the Concepts of Form and Matter

Key Words

Aristotle, third man argument, form and matter coexistence, first philosophy, transcendentalism.

Introduction

This chapter primarily deals with Aristotle's criticism of Platonic idealism and his development of an alternate metaphysics. Here he proposes a dualism of form and matter. We shall begin with an assessment of Aristotle's intellectual contributions and then examine the salient features of his refutation of Plato's Idealism. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Plato proposes an uncompromising idealism and monism, which posit essences or forms as the only realities and treated everything else as unreal and relegated the material world to the realm of mere appearances. Aristotle's theory retains some of his teacher's insights, as he too considers the forms as ultimate realities, but rejects the master's transcendentalism and makes the forms immanent to the objects of the material world. He employs concepts like potentiality and actuality in order to explain this fruitful coexistence of form and matter.

Aristotle was born at Stagira, in Macedonian in the year 384 B.C as the son of a physician and all his initial training were in the science of medicine which left a significant mark on his later thinking and life. He studied under Plato for several years and was a prominent member of Plato's Academy. But he later became a critic of Platonism, particularly of the master's transcendentalism. Aristotle was reported to have stated that wisdom will not die with Plato. After Plato's death he was forced to leave the Academy and eventually established his own school the Lyceum. Unlike Academy, where the importance was to abstract philosophical and mathematical thinking, the Lyceum gave equal importance to enquiries in physical sciences, aesthetics and politics.

Aristotle's Intellectual Contributions

Aristotle has contributed immensely to a variety of disciplines and areas of study as they spread across a vast intellectual domain ranging from biology to aesthetics. His contributions are foundational in the world of natural sciences, particularly in biology, as

he has done extensive experimental work and classified the living world into different categories that enabled future work. Aristotle also laid foundations to the study of logic as a science and art of thinking and also to Ethics as a science of life. His works on aesthetics were seminal contributions to the discipline and referring to his intellectual contributions Russell makes the following observation:

Aristotle, as a philosopher, is in many ways very different from all his predecessors. He is the first to write like a professor: his treatises are systematic, his discussions are divided into heads, he is a professional teacher, not an inspired prophet. His work is critical, careful, pedestrian, without any trace of Bacchic enthusiasm. [Russell: *A History of Western Philosophy*]

Aristotle's Criticism of Plato

Aristotle has stated that, "Wisdom will never die with Plato", and on another occasion he said, Plato is dear, but truth is dearer. As mentioned above, while Academy was dedicated to speculative and political philosophy, Lyceum took biology and natural sciences seriously. But metaphysics or first philosophy occupies a central role in his scheme of things as well. According to him, mathematical and physical sciences treat of the quantity, quality, and relations of things. On the other hand, the first philosophy deals with the category of substance and also studies the causes of things. It enquires into the nature of being without considering the conditions imposed by space and time. The absolute and necessary being, as understood by Aristotle, is the eternal essence of things as opposed to the relative, contingent, and accidental. In this regard he agrees with Plato to a great deal.

Aristotle's major criticism of Plato's philosophy targeted the latter's idea of universal essences. For Plato they are universal and objective realities and they exist independent of objects. They are eternal and imperishable and the objects in the world are fundamentally unreal and are mere copies of these eternal essences. Aristotle agrees with Plato on many counts. But he opposes the latter's transcendentalism, which maintains that the essences are apart from the things. According to Aristotle, essences or forms are immanent to things.

As Russell says, Aristotle considered them as common nouns and not as objective realities and things. Any name capable of universal application to the members of a class represents a universal. Opposing Plato's theory, which posits them as abstract original forms to which objects "participate", Aristotle initiates the third man argument.

Third Man Argument

This argument aims at criticizing Plato's theory of ideas, which according to Aristotle states that, "a man is a man because he resembles or participates in the idea of man in the world of essences." Aristotle states that, if a man is a man because he resembles the ideal man, there must be a still more ideal man to whom both ordinary men and the ideal man are similar. Aristotle intends to demonstrate that the notion of imitation or copying used in the theory of forms runs into logical difficulties. In order to explain the similarity between a man and the form of man, one needs to construe a third form of man, and this always requires another form and hence the theory of ideas leads to ad infinitum.

Aristotle further asks whether the ideal man is an ideal animal. If he is, there must be as many ideal animals as there are species of animals. Again, how does the perfect and the eternal world be held responsible for the imperfect and perishable world of material objects?

Plato's transcendentalism conceived Ideas as real beings existing apart from the individuals, which express them. Aristotle finds this position objectionable. He asks, if the general Idea is the substance of the particulars or the essence of the things, how can it exist apart from that of which it is the substance and the essence? He affirms that the general cannot exist outside of and along side of the particular. According to him ideas considered as such and apart from the things, are not real beings or substances.

Opposing Plato he maintains that the phenomenal world is not unreal and argues that both form and matter coexist in the world of objects. Their coexistence is responsible for the existence of the world we live. Since he considers this world as real he finds it worthwhile in pursuing knowledge about it. This makes natural scientific investigations meaningful and important. He maintains that genuine scientific knowledge is not a mere acquaintance with facts as knowledge consists in knowing the reasons and causes of things and it should explain why they cannot be other than what they are. The theory of form-matter coexistence answers these fundamental questions.

Aristotle asserts that ideas do not and cannot exist apart from things. On the other hand, they are inherent or immanent in things. The idea is the form of the thing, and cannot be separated from it except by abstraction. It is the essence of the particular and with it constitutes an indivisible whole. For example, Aristotle would hold that there is manness because there are actual men in this world. There is parenthood, because there are parents. Russell elucidates Aristotle's argument of immanence with an interesting

simile. He says that, when we say "there is such a thing as the game of football," it will be nonsensical to assume that football could exist without football-players. Russell in his usual style of language analysis explains Aristotle's position in the following way.

And this dependence is thought to be not reciprocal: the men who play football would still exist even if they never played football; things which are usually sweet may turn sour; and my face, which is usually red, may turn pale without ceasing to be my face. In this way we are led to conclude that what is meant by an adjective is dependent for its being on what is meant by a proper name, but not vice versa. This is, I think, what Aristotle means. His doctrine on this point, as on many others, is a common-sense prejudice **pedantically expressed.**

Aristotle's **concept of matter** is unique. According to him matter is coexistent with form and different forms design matter differently in the process of evolution of objects. It is something that changes and Aristotle believed that each concrete instance of matter has an inner purpose. It is destined to become something. But Aristotle also maintains that matter has no reality apart from the form, as matter without the Idea is also an abstraction like Idea apart from particular object.

We shall take a concrete example of a pen in order to understand the concept of matter and matter-form relationship. Let us consider the form and matter of a ball pen. The form of the ball point pen is constituted by the properties of the pen, it has a ball point, it has ink in it, it can be used to write and can be held by the hand. Matter on the other hand is the material stuff to which these properties are attached to, the material by which the pen is made up of etc. The form of the pen, he affirms, is inherent in the material stuff. The former does not have an existence apart from and independent of the latter or many such pens. But in a unique manner, the form is independent, as it does not depend on any particular pen in this world. At the same time, Aristotle is not prepared to separate the form completely from the actual pens in the world.

Aristotle's philosophical perspective advocates avoiding the extremes and adopting a middle path. His metaphysical theory thus adopts a position, which avoids the extremes of Platonism and Atomism. He rejects Plato's view, which considers essences alone as real and the material world as illusion. As a consequence of his idealism, Plato also affirmed that all change is an illusion. The Atomists, on the other hand, advocated a unique form of materialism, which holds that everything is made up of atoms. According to them, the ultimate reality is constitutive of atoms and they try to explain the nature of reality and world in quantitative terms. They hold that atoms have no natural properties and all qualities and nature of objects result from a combination of atoms. Atoms

themselves have no natural qualities. To this Aristotle responds by arguing that, if qualities and properties are not actually there but are only illusions, then the sensible world cannot be trusted. Aristotle holds that everything that exists has a definite nature and hence is potential to become something.

Aristotle explains matter in terms of substantial material elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether. These five basic elements have qualities and each is distinguished from the other in terms of their unique quality and hence things have definite nature. Hence the Atomists' doctrine is unacceptable for him. Aristotle says that these qualities can transfer through matter.

One important aspect of Aristotle's metaphysics is his conception that all change is evolution. He maintains that all change is evolution. Form and matter, according to him, eternally coexist as they cannot be separated from one another. The form of an object changes when it evolves into another thing. For example, seed into tree. Here matter remains more or less the same and different forms design the matter differently. In this process of evolution, the seed becomes a tree; it realizes its purpose. Aristotle here provides a teleological explanation of the universe in terms of the matter-form relationship.

Though the forms are eternal and non-perishable—and here Aristotle subscribes to the Platonic view—he maintains that they are nevertheless not transcendent. It is often stated that Aristotle has brought forms from heaven to earth. According to him, they are not apart from things but in them. They are not transcendent, but immanent. On the other hand, matter too is equally real and eternal. It is not non-being, but dynamic and is in the process of change. Matter realizes the form or idea of the thing in the process of evolution. Aristotle explains the problem of change in the world with this dualism of form and matter and their constant coexistence.

Here Aristotle significantly deviates from Plato's position, which held that all change is illusion. According to Plato the material world is a copy and hence no knowledge is possible about it. We can form only opinions about it. Aristotle, on the other hand considers the material world as real and explains it in terms of the above described form-matter coexistence. His conception of change becomes relevant in this context. His theory of change is different from most of his predecessors. Unlike Plato and Parmenides, he never treated change as unreal and an illusion. But he does not agree with Heraclitus and others who find nothing but blind change as real. Aristotle adopts a middle path and affirms that all change is not illusion. Change is not blind, but purposeful and meaningful.

Every entity in nature is actually something and has the potential to become something else. For example, the seed is actually a seed but it has the potential to become a tree. According to Aristotle, in the seed state, the form of seed fashions or shapes in order to make it an actual seed. But as the seed progresses to the tree, it gets shaped and designed by different other forms. Finally the seed actualizes its potentials and becomes a tree.

Aristotle thus considers both change and permanence are real. In change it is the form that changes while the matter remains the same. Change occurs when the arrangement of the matter changes. Even though the form of an object can change, it is form, not matter, that provides the order and permanence in the world. The matter of all things is ultimately the same.

Underlying this conception of change is his idea that all change is purposeful, because, according to him all change is evolution. He further explains this theory with a teleological explanation. He contends that the essential form of a thing determines what an object is and it guides the changes and development of that thing. Hence changes are not blind or illusory, but are intelligible. During evolution an organism realizes its purpose. Hence, there is no concept of complete change. Only some aspects of the form of a thing changes and as long as a thing remains in existence, its essential form remains the same. An apple seed will evolve into an apple tree and not to anything else. The form of the matter changes in those ways that are necessary for it to become an apple tree.

Again, while Plato rejected the world as illusion, for Aristotle it is real. The world is not just an imitation or a shadow, but a reality and hence it is possible to have knowledge about it. Consequently, Aristotle believes that studying the processes of the natural world is not worthless. This approach to the physical world and knowledge about it had encouraged the growth of natural sciences. We can see that the systematic study of natural sciences began with Aristotle's systematic approach to the knowledge about the natural world. It was he who initiated the classification of the living universe as species and genera, which even today lies at the foundation of elementary scientific enquiries.

Aristotle's Ethical Theory

As mentioned above, Aristotle adopts a teleological approach and attempts to explain everything, including human reality with the assumption that the nature of reality, including the human world, can be explained teleologically; as the actualization of a

purpose. According to him, the purpose of human life is *eudemonia*. Before we explain what this constitutes, let us examine his conception of human reality.

Aristotle conceived ethics as a very important science and according to him it deals with actual human behavior. Unlike Plato, he affirmed that the empirical world and life in it are valuable. But unlike the materialists, he adopts a teleological conception of human life and hence conceived that there is a higher purpose to life, which needs to be realized in our present life in this world. Russell comments that, Aristotle's metaphysics, roughly speaking, may be described as Plato diluted by common sense. He is difficult because Plato and common sense do not mix easily.

Quiz

1. According to Aristotle, what is the subject matter of first philosophy?
(a) Quantity and quality of things (b) The category of substance (c) About the nature of material reality (d) About transcendental essences.
2. According to Aristotle, the absolute and necessary being is:
(a) The eternal essence of things (b) The objects themselves are ultimately real (c) The atoms that constitute things (d) The transcendental ideas.
3. According to Aristotle, genuine scientific knowledge consists in:
(a) Acquaintance with facts (b) Knowing the reasons and causes of things (c) Knowing the essences of things (d) Knowing to distinguish right from wrong.
4. Which of the following is not acceptable to Aristotle?
(a) Ideas do not exist apart from things (b) Ideas are inherent or immanent in things (c) Ideas are transcendental (d) None of the above.
5. Which of the following is true of Aristotle?
(a) Matter changes while form remains the same (b) Change occurs when the matter changes (c) Form provides the order and permanence in the world (d) All of the above

Answer key

1. (b)
2. (a)
3. (b)
4. (c)
5. (c)

Assignmentas

1. Describe Aristotle's criticism of Plato's idealism.

2. Discuss how does Aristotle explain the problem of change.

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Chapter Six

Aristotle's Theory of Causation and the Ideas of Potentiality and Actuality

Key Words: Form and matter, potentiality and actuality, teleological, change, evolution. Formal cause, material cause, efficient cause, final cause, unmoved mover, God, eudaemonia, virtue.

This chapter will explain Aristotle's teleological conception of reality, a doctrine we have introduced in the previous chapter. We have seen how Aristotle deals with the problem of change. He conceives it as evolution, where in the process of becoming, the potentialities of a thing are actualized and the different forms design the matter differently. The form of an object changes when it evolves into another thing. For example, In the process of the seed evolving into a tree, different forms design the matter in different ways in each stage of its evolution. Matter remains more or less the same.

Aristotle thus proclaims that change is not blind or meaningless, but is purposeful and hence is teleological. All change is evolution. The whole process is explained by analyzing the relationship between form and matter, the two ultimate realities in his metaphysical scheme. As far as conceiving the general Idea as the essence of the particular, he agrees with Plato. But he opposes Plato's transcendentalism and affirms that Ideas do not exist apart from things. Instead, idea is inherent or immanent in the thing by being its form and hence cannot be separated from it except by abstraction.

To understand Aristotle's idea of evolution we may have to know how he explains the relationship between form and matter and how he accounts for motion or movement in his scheme. Reality is constituted of all the three: form, matter and movement. As mentioned above, forms are immanent in things, which are constitutive of matter and matter has no reality apart from the form. Movement also cannot exist by itself and presupposes a substratum. In other words, form, matter and movement have no real or substantial existence independent of each other. Reality consists of all these taken as a whole and these constitutive elements of reality can only be separated in thought.

The problem of change is a perennial philosophical problem in many civilizations. It is also related to the question of the nature of reality. For example, in Indian philosophy many

systems like Buddhism, Nyaya, Samkhya and Vedanta have different conceptions about the nature and reality of change. In the Greek tradition itself this has been a major issues of debate, in which Heraclitus and Parmenides have taken opposite stands; the former proposing ceaseless change while the latter conceiving change as illusory. Plato followed Parmenides and rejected the reality of change. Aristotle brings all these problems into a single framework and presents a comprehensive conception of reality. He adopts a middle path, which seeks to avoid the extremes.

Aristotle's View of Change

Aristotle's philosophy introduces a teleological conception in the very outset and explains the nature of reality accordingly. This view holds that behind everything that happens in the world a purpose is unraveled. There is a higher purpose, which is being realized. Hence in order to understand anything one needs to understand this purpose. For this we have to analyze the form—matter relationship in the light of two other concepts of potentiality and actuality.

The distinction between the two concepts of potentiality and actuality helps us understand the nature of reality and the form—matter relationship in a better manner. It also helps understanding the nature of change. Aristotle holds that bare matter is potentiality of form. According to him, different forms shape the matter differently in change. At every stage of evolution, the thing in question will have more form than before. In other words, it is then more actual, a more advanced stage of existence. Aristotle's theory of causation explains the process of becoming things undergo with the explanation of change in various stages. For example when a seed evolves into a tree, it necessarily happens through several stages; seed →sapling→tree→fruit.

But underlying these different stages, there must be something that undergoes changes; something that persists in the change. Here Aristotle's theory of causation explains how matter remains changeless and persists during change. It exhibits different qualities—as a result of being shaped or designed by different forms—on different occasions or stages of evolution. During change, an object changes its form. But form itself does not change and become anything different than what it is. In this sense, forms are also changeless. Here he agrees with Plato who considers forms as essences.

Aristotle's theory of causation thus explains the form—matter relationship in the following manner. Matter assumes different forms and this is manifested as a series in the process of evolution. Different forms have always existed and they one after another shape the matter. This happens in a series, which is manifested as change in the external world. Neither matter nor form come into existence or disappear, as they are eternal principles of things. According to Aristotle, change in the physical world presupposes a peculiar interrelation with them. He conceives matter as the principle of possibility and form as the principle of reality or actuality. Evolution is the process where things evolve towards stages of existence that will have more and more form than before and this process continues till change becomes unnecessary; until all the potentialities are actualized.

Aristotle's God

This presupposes a concept of pure form and pure actuality and suggests such a being in whom they come together. God is such a being who is pure form and pure actuality. He is the unmoved mover. Aristotle's teleological conception has its culmination in this idea of God as the unmoved mover, the Form of all forms. God is conceived as the Supreme Being, as the pure form and pure actuality. He is never changing, the eternal first cause of the universe, the only true substance, and pure actuality. In this sense Aristotle's God is not the God of any religion. He is someone in whom motion has originated, which nevertheless remains unmoved.

The concept of God substantiates Aristotle's teleological outlook which conceives the motion of the universe as purposeful and meaningful. As Russell observes, this notion of God helps him presenting his doctrine as optimistic and teleological: the universe and everything in it is developing towards something continually better than what went before. Hence Aristotle's scheme of things have the God at the center, to which he relates other important concepts. Like potentiality and actuality, form and matter, the doctrine that all change is evolution and finally the theory of causation.

The Theory of Causation

The discussion of the thesis that all change is evolution is incomplete without elaborating the doctrine of causation, which would explain the generative causes of real being or the cause of all things in nature. It has to explain further the principles of causation that produces change and results in the production of objects of art and even of human beings. Aristotle thus

introduces four categories of causes; the formal, material, efficient and final. We shall explain this with the help of an example of a carpenter making a wooden chair.

The formal cause is the idea or plan in the mind of the carpenter, according to which he makes the chair. It is the blue print or the plan, which he has in the mind. The material cause is the wood of which the chair is made; the efficient cause is the arms, hands, and tools, as motive forces used by the carpenter. It is through these efficient causes he makes the chair. The final cause is the final product, the chair, which is the purpose that set these forces in action and effected the transition from potentiality to actuality. In other words, it is that for the sake of which it is made.

Aristotle conceives that these four principles operate, not only in the objects we human make (like chairs and other artifacts) but also in nature; the only difference is that, in the case of nature the artist and his product are not separate. Here the form or plan and the end or purpose coincides. He argues that the purpose of the organism is the realization of its form, which is the idea of motion. Hence in the ultimate sense, there are only two causes: form and matter.

In the process of evolution matter evolves into what it is potential of. For example, the seed into the tree, the wood into chair. The potentiality represents its purpose and hence it can also be equated with a directing force inherent in matter. We may say that the directing force inherent in the seed makes it a tree and it cannot become anything else. Potentiality of a thing is determined by form, which is actuality. Hence it is fixed and not accidental. Here Aristotle opposes the mechanistic-atomistic view advocated by Democritus and many others. He argues that change is not blind or purposeless; instead it is teleological. Nature is dynamic and teleological and not mechanical.

As we have seen above, the concept of God helps Aristotle to explain the inherent teleology in the universe. This idea of God enables Aristotle establishing the unity of the universe and accounting for the beginning of motion. Motion in turn, enables the actualization of the potential. Matter has an inherent tendency to move towards its potentials, as in the case of the seed, which has the tendency to move towards the tree. In other words, we may say that matter has a desire for the form.

The Aristotelian ontology is thus constitutive of God, matter and form. Since matter and form are eternal and they eternally coexist, motion is also eternal. This eternal motion in turn

presupposes an eternal unmoved mover, who is God, the ultimate cause of motion which is unmoved. Motion has its beginning there in God who is the eternal unmoved first mover. He is the fundamental ground of all vital forces in nature and is the pure form without matter. He is the absolute spirit, the highest purpose of the world, the highest good of the world and the highest motivating force of the universe. All beings crave for the realization of their potentialities because of this ultimate motivator.

It is God who gives the universe a higher purpose which causes motion. He is the highest Good, who comprises all actuality and who is pure intelligence. He is the unifying principle of the universe and every possibility realizes in Him. He is the principle of all order and unity.

The Place of Man and His Highest Goal: *Eudaemonia* and the Concept of Virtue

Aristotle's philosophy reserves a special place for man, as he is different from other living creatures. Man according to him is a rational animal, who is the final goal of nature. What makes man different is the presence of a soul which can rationalize and conceptualize.

The human being has a body and a soul. The body is only an instrument and hence it presupposes a user who uses it, which is the soul. The soul is the agent of motion in the body as no motion is mechanical. It is also the principle of life, as it controls and guides all motion.

One peculiar feature of Aristotle's philosophy in general and his conception of man in particular is the explanation provided in the light of a doctrine of function. Aristotle's teleological outlook urges that all human actions have some goal, which itself is a means to a still higher goal and so on and on. This points to the fact that there is a supreme end or purpose, which is the ultimate good for the sake of which every other good is sought.

We may explain this in a different way. Aristotle argues that every object has a specific end or good. Which consists in the realization of its specific nature. This specific nature distinguishes it from other things. Now he examines what is this specific nature of man. Human nature cannot be understood in terms of mere a vegetative existence as in the case of plants nor in terms of animal functions like perception, desires, pain, pleasure etc. Instead, man's life is a life of reason, the attribute that distinguishes man from the rest of the creatures. Therefore, the highest good of man is the realization of this life of reason. In this

context Aristotle introduces the concept of *eudaemonia*, which according to him is the highest good for man.

Aristotle argues that the human soul has irrational parts as well and hence reason needs to coordinate all of them to attain the final goal. He thus says that this consists in achieving the right relationship and balance between reason, feeling and desire. Here he exhibits his aversion towards adopting the extreme viewpoints. He advocates an avoidance of extremes and argues that virtues consist in this.

Eudaemonia as such is not a passive internal feeling. It consists in the experience of a better life or the best life itself, where all of our functions are fulfilled. It also means to live a virtuous life. To elaborate this Aristotle explicates a tripartite conception of the human soul. The soul has nutritive or vegetative functions which cause nutrition and growth. This aspect of the soul is irrational. The other function of the soul is appetitive, which is attentive to reasoning. But the third part, which is intellectual is rational in itself. *Eudaemonia* presupposes a life of reason as it is superior to the other two and the distinguishing feature of man.

Virtues also play a crucial role in this process. Aristotle asserts that virtues are to be sought for attaining *eudaemonia*. A virtue is a mean between two vices and hence it consists in the avoidance of excess as well as deficit. It is a trait that contributes to a person functioning well as a human being. In other words, a trait that engages him in a life of reason. It is thus a learned disposition to reason and act in a certain way.

There are predominantly two kinds of virtues: intellectual and moral. The former can be taught directly and the latter is the result of habit and must be lived to be learned. It is the result of a practical wisdom and is the golden mean or intermediate between two extremes. For example bravery is the mean or intermediate between cowardliness and rashness and it has to be learned through practice. No virtue can be learned on a purely intellectual level.

Quiz:

1. According to Aristotle, what happens when things change?
(a) They evolve (b) Their potentialities are actualized (c) Different forms design the matter differently (d) All of the above.
2. Which of the following is true of Aristotle?

- (a) Form and matter are unrelated independent realities (b) Form is indepent but matter depends on form (c) Form alone is real, matter is unreal (d) Form and matter have no real or substantial existence independent of each other
3. When a thing evolves it undergoes several stages of existence. In each stage:
(a) The thing has more form than the preceding stage (b) The matter of which the thing is constituted changes (c) as unreal as the previous stage as all change is illusory (d) None of the above.
4. Aristotle's God is:
(a) Creator of the universe (b) pure form and pure actuality (c) Pure Form (d) Pure actuality.
5. The motive forces like hands, and tools, used by the carpenter to make a chair is:
(a) Formal cause (b) Material cause (c) Efficient cause (d) Final cause.

Answer Key:

1. (c)
2. (d)
3. (a)
4. (b)
5. (c)

Assignment

1. Explain Aristotle's theory of causation.
2. Discuss Aristotle's conception of God.
3. Explain the process of change as discussed by Aristotle.

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Chapter Seven

Medieval Philosophy

Key Words: Scholasticism, theology, Christianity, Apologists, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, God, reason and faith, two-fold theory of truth, Cosmological argument, argument from design.

Aristotle's death created a vacuum in Greek intellectual culture as afterwards it failed to produce a thinker who would equal the imagination of either Plato or Aristotle, the two great system builders of ancient Greek thought. Later, with the emergence of Christianity, the decline was complete. Now we come across another interesting development in human intellectual history; the emergence of Scholasticism; the tradition of Catholic theologians. While the Greeks in general were rational, critical and advocated free thinking, the Scholastic thinkers who were inspired by the official philosophy of the Catholic Church underlined uncritical and unconditional faith. For them the authority of the Bible and of the Catholic Church was unquestionable.

During the last period of Hellenic speculation, Christianity became popular in the Roman kingdom. In turn, Christianity was influenced by the philosophical traditions of the Greek-Roman world. One of the greatest challenges faced by early Christianity was to justify its beliefs on rational grounds. The early theologians thus turned to the established philosophical tradition of the Greek world, particularly to the philosophical theories of Plato and Aristotle. The Apologists attempted to philosophically defend faith and used some fundamental insights of the Greek philosophical tradition in order to provide rational expression to fundamental Christian beliefs.

They also had to develop philosophical principles that would link the various dictums of Christian belief with the life of men in this world and hence had to formulate doctrines and theories. The birth of what is known as Scholastic philosophy therefore can be traced to these attempts of the early Christian thinkers to expose, systematize and demonstrate the Christian dogmas. For the ancient Greek thinkers, philosophy was primarily a rational and critical endeavour. The Greeks not only developed rational philosophical systems but also initiated scientific thinking and promoted critical reflection in many spheres of human life. But for the Scholastic thinkers, philosophy was a handmaiden of religion and they hardly encouraged rational and critical reflections independent of the religious dogmas.

Scholastic Philosophy

The Scholastic philosophy by and large accepts the truth of Christianity without questioning them. Hence it cannot be treated as philosophy in the strict sense of the term. According to the Scholastic thinkers, philosophy was at the service of religion or was a handmaiden of theology. They employed the techniques of philosophers; rational speculation. But unlike the philosophers who would not accept anything without questioning it, the theologians accepted certain beliefs about God and His powers without questioning their validity.

It was Apostle Paul who offered a Christian theology for the first time. Afterwards the Gnostics who dominated the Catholic system attempted developing a philosophy of Christianity by bringing together Greek metaphysics and Christian dogmas and later the Apologists developed a more systematic doctrine, which they thought would justify Christian beliefs.

Medieval Philosophy: An Introduction

The term medieval philosophy is used to designate the period from the end of the Roman Empire in Italy until the Renaissance; roughly from the 5th to 15th century A.D. It designates the philosophy of Western Europe between the decline of classical pagan culture and the Renaissance. During this period Latin became the official language of Catholicism and also acquired the status of a language, which was employed for articulating scholarly thoughts. In other words, Latin was medieval European philosophy's Sanskrit.

There are several historical factors that have led to the emergence of Scholasticism. The collapse of Roman civilization was definitely the most significant factor behind its emergence. In one sense the Church had replaced the empire and its social structures and remained till the end of 12th century the institution that supported and controlled intellectual culture in Europe.

Theoretically, the most fundamental insights of Scholastic thinking were derived from the intellectual insights of Athenian philosophy, particularly from the philosophical doctrines of Plato and Aristotle. During the 4th century AD, Boethius (480-525) had written commentaries on Plato's and Aristotle's works which became popular among intellectuals of that age. The Jewish tradition was another significant influence and during these early years. Islamic philosophers and Indian thinkers also would have influenced the

Scholastic thinkers, as these two were the major spiritual traditions of those days. But later by 12th century AD Aristotle became more influential.

Among the Greek philosophers, it was Plato and Aristotle who were more influential. **Platonism** was found interesting and useful by the early theologians owing to its stress on the idea of eternal soul and condemnation of matter as unreal. Plato's doctrine of soul advocated its eternity and has also discussed the problem of its moral development. Plato's hardcore monistic philosophy had separated the soul from the body and elevated the former to the domain of reality.

But the Scholastic thinkers also faced some difficulties with Plato's doctrines as the latter advocated more radical views about the soul's moral development than the official Catholic thinkers. Plato held that souls would reincarnate and the Christian idea of resurrection does not fit within Plato's doctrine of soul and its moral development. Plato envisages a union of the soul with the ultimately Good, a proposition which was unthinkable for the Catholic philosophers, as they considered God as the absolute being who remains a separate entity with supreme absolute status than everything else that depend on Him.

St. Augustine's (AD 353-430) Philosophy

Augustine is arguably the most influential of all Middle Ages thinkers and his philosophy addresses a fundamental problem, which all those thinkers who attempt at reconciling faith with reason would encounter: the apparent opposition between religion and philosophy or faith and reason. Augustine ventures to argue that religion can aid philosophy in its rational pursuits and also holds that revealing its philosophical basis can enrich Christianity. His *Confessions* is one of the most influential and important philosophical works of all times.

Intellectually, Augustine was significantly influenced by Plato and his followers and was particularly fascinated by the idea that the physical is separated from the spiritual. He treated this separation as a very important problem. But philosophically he was preoccupied with the concept of God and held that the only knowledge worth having is the knowledge of God. He argues that it was God who created substance, and was also responsible for the order and arrangement the world exhibits. God has created time when he created the world, as God remains the eternal, timeless creator of everything. He is the ultimate source of everything and points of origin of everything. God is equated with Being, Goodness and Truth

What is characteristic of Augustine's philosophical doctrine is a reconciliation of the dualism between religion and philosophy on the one hand and faith and reason on the other. He contends that reason is capable of comprehending God, as God has given reason to us in order that we may know all things including God. Philosophy occupies a very important role in this endeavour. To philosophize is to see truth directly and without the intervention of the eyes of the body. Reason, according to him, is the eye of the soul and wisdom is the highest truth after which we should strive. He affirms that wisdom is nothing but God and to have wisdom means to have God.

The dualism is further reconciled by demonstrating how a true philosophy can become identical with true religion. According to Augustine, both have the same strivings for the eternal. God despises Reason, his first-born Son, which is God himself to us in order to make us more perfect than other beings. But while reconciling faith with reason he maintains that chronologically, faith precedes intelligence, as in order to understand a thing we must first believe it. In other words, faith is a condition of knowledge. It is a provisional state, inferior to knowledge, and ultimately resolves itself into it. Faith and reason are uniquely correlated. Augustine summons that we must understand what we firmly believe and see the rationality of our faith. We may understand in order that you may believe, and believe in order that you may understand, says Augustine.

Concept of God in Augustine's Philosophy

This is the central idea of Augustine's philosophy. According to him, God is the being beyond whom, outside of whom, and without whom, nothing exists. God is the beginning, the middle, and the end of all things. He is good and yet without quality. He is great, without being a quantity. Augustine holds that qualities like goodness, justice, and wisdom are not accidental attributes of God, but they constitute his innermost essence. Again, omnipotence, omnipresence, and eternity are his divine essence. Everything is in God, though he is not the All. God is the creator of intelligence and yet is superior to it. He is present everywhere, without being bound to any place. He exists and yet is nowhere. He lives eternally and yet is not in time. He is the principle of all change and yet immutable.

With regard to the question of knowing God, Augustine is keen in pointing out some difficulties we may encounter when we try to comprehend God with the employment of reason. He warns that reason encounters antinomies in speculating about God. Reason can only negatively describe God and can state what God is not. In other

words, with reason alone one cannot comprehend God's nature. Augustine admits that reason can partly conceive God, but definitely cannot comprehend God in the fullness of his perfection. God, according to Augustine, is absolutely holy and cannot will evil. In God willing and doing are one, in the sense that, what he wills is done without any intermediate being. All ideas or forms of things are in Him and everything owes its form to Him.

The **God – world relationship** is also unique. God had created the world out of nothing and this process of creation is something that is ongoing. It is affirmed that the world actually depends on God, who was also responsible for the creation of time and space. It was God who created matter and everything that we experience. But this process of creation also indicates how much God loves His creation. God had created the world on account of his infinite love.

Augustine had gone to the extent of saying that God and the world which he created are identical. This is often described as Augustinian pantheism, though in reality he was not a pantheist and had ultimately viewed God and the world as different from each other.

The most interesting aspect of Augustine's doctrine of God is his treatment of the problem of evil. He had advocated what is known as the doctrine of *ex nihilo*. To understand his position let us consider the following passage from David Hume's writings:

Is he [Deity] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?
(David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion)

The question is, where does evil come from? If God is good and has created all these things good then is God himself the creator of evil? If God is not the creator of evil, then there must be someone else independent of God who had created it. This would reject God's immutability and absolute status. But we know that God is the cause of everything and if at all evil exists, God would have created it. But we also know that God is absolute goodness and the whole of creation is an expression of His goodness. Everything that exists is then good, as they would have been emanated from God. But being a Good and benevolent being God would have willed everything for the best of his creatures. If then, what about evil? We may here reach a paradoxical conclusion that if everything is good then evil also must be good.

To resolve this paradox, Augustine argues that, evil is like the shadow of a picture. Like the shadow, it belongs to the beauty of the whole. Of course, evil as such is not good, but it is good that evil is. It is a privation of essence and the omission of good and it depends on the good for its existence. If there is no good, there is no evil. It is the absence of something which nature ought to have. Augustine adds that moral evil comes from a defective will and the worst form of evil is turning away from God.

Now that question needs to be answered is, why did not God omit evil? Since God is omnipotent and nothing is impossible to him, he could have omitted evil and saved mankind from its endless sufferings. Here again Augustine justifies God's act of creating evil by saying that he had done it in order to serve the good. By creating evil, God had enhanced the glory of the universe.

In other words, we may say that, according to Augustine, in the strict sense of the term, real evil does not exist and it exists only as a privation or absence of the good. Its presence makes man more and more responsible and in this sense adds meaning to his life which needs to be understood in terms of the moral development of the soul.

The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas

Though many of the primary objectives of Aquinas' philosophy were similar to Augustine's, his approach and conclusions were significantly different, as unlike the latter, Aquinas was influenced by Aristotle's philosophy and he actually aims at a synthesizing of Christianity with the philosophy of Aristotle. He had written commentaries to many of Aristotle's works including, *On the Soul*, *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Metaphysics* and inaugurated a new era in the history of Christian theology by significantly varying from the prevailing outlook of Christian theologians who were influenced by Plato's philosophy and his uncompromising idealism. Aquinas opposed those Platonist theologians who refuted the reality of the concrete physical world and emphasized the realm of abstract and purely spiritual forms and ideas.

Aquinas attempted demonstrating the rationality of the universe as a revelation of God and tried to explain the relationship between philosophy and theology and faith and reason from an Aristotelian perspective, which adopts a dualism. He tries to show how these opposing approaches actually do supplement each other. But most important of his philosophical doctrines is his assertion of the superiority of faith.

Following Aristotle, Aquinas maintains that the physical world has an undeniable reality. According to him, the soul and the body are in union. This feature of his thought

attempts overcoming the prevailing body-negativism by proclaiming that the body and the natural world have value. Aquinas looks for a compromise between the divine and material realities. It is possible to have knowledge about the world. But the usual methods we employ to gain knowledge would be insufficient for that.

Knowledge and the role of philosophy

Aquinas affirms that our entire intellectual knowledge rise from the senses and all philosophy start with what we know about existing objects. Hence he maintains that the common starting points to human thought are grounded in sense perception and it is the objective of philosophy to identify them. Aquinas was more an Aristotelian than a Platonist and accordingly contended that the empirical world as real. As we have seen in a previous chapter, since Aristotle considers the empirical world as real, knowledge about the same was a major concern for him. Aquinas too considers the knowledge about the empirical world as important, as he maintains that the world created by God should not be completely negated. Hence the scientific endeavours are considered as legitimate. Since such endeavours presuppose reason, it has an important place and value in human endeavours. But he reminds that it has its limitations.

Reason and Faith

Like most theologians, Aquinas too tries to ascribe reason an important place and assigns to reason a function. Nevertheless, he was not prepared to grant it an ultimate status. The search for truth does not exhaust with rational enquiries. Reason enlightens us about many aspects of reality, but with reason alone we cannot demonstrate things like Trinity, incarnation, original sin, creation of the world in time, the sacraments etc. which are central concerns of Christianity. In other words, philosophy, being a rational endeavour, falls short of dealing with them. He affirms that they are revealed truths that are beyond reason and hence are not objects of philosophy. Reason can neither prove nor disprove them. But Aquinas maintains that they are not altogether unreasonable.

In this context of discussing the nature of religious claims he introduces the two-fold theory of truth. Religious claims call for a two-fold theory of truth; the one, which the inquiry of reason can reach, and that which surpasses the whole ability of the human reason. The example for the former is the proofs theologians and philosophers have advanced for proving God's existence and for the latter is the conception of Trinity, eternal life etc. Aquinas emphasizes that there is no contradiction between them. Aquinas argues that matters that are revealed are not necessarily unreasonable, as if we believe in

them, their reasonableness would become clear. On the other hand, he asserts that we cannot provide rational proofs for the mysteries of religion, as they presuppose faith. Aquinas writes:

There is a twofold mode of truth in what we profess about God. Some truths about God exceed all the ability of human reason. Such is the truth that God is triune. But there are some truths which the natural reason also is able to reach. Such are the truth that God exists, that he is one, and the like. In fact, such truths about God have been proved demonstratively by the philosophers, guided by the light of natural reason. (Aquinas: *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, ch.3, n.2)

In other words, the twofold theory of truth separates revealed theology from rational theology. The former is dogmatic and is beyond errors, while the latter is philosophical, but can err and hence is imperfect. Revealed theology is a genuine speculative science, which is not based on natural experience and reason. It is the science that concerns with knowledge of God and hence is nobler than any other science. On the other hand, rational theology can make demonstrations using the articles of faith as its principles and can apologetically refute objections raised against the faith even if no articles of faith are presupposed.

Proofs for the Existence of God

Before we conclude the discussions of this chapter, we shall briefly examine the proofs for God's existence as discussed by Aquinas. As we have seen, this aspect of theology is rational, as it tries to rationally justify God's existence. Aquinas in the *Summa Theologia* outlines five 'proofs for God's existence; the first three ways deal with the cosmological argument, the fourth with the moral argument and the last one with teleological arguments (argument from design).

The cosmological argument is based on Aristotle's conception of the prime mover, or the unmoved mover. Like Aristotle who says that the universe demands the existence of something which moves, without itself being moved by something else, this argument states that all moving things presuppose an unchanging and an unmoving entity. This argument thus starts from the idea of motion. Motion implies the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. For example, when a seed becomes a tree, it is the potentialities of the seed which is getting actualized in the process. But something that is already in actuality alone can move a thing from potentiality to actuality. In other words, a thing cannot be both a mover and moved at the same time- self-mover. Whatever is

moved is moved by another and that by yet another and this cannot go to infinity. Hence there must be a first mover who is God.

The second way to demonstrate the cosmological argument is by means of the idea of efficient cause. It says that the world has an order of efficient causes. Everything in the world has a cause. But a thing cannot be the efficient cause of itself, as it cannot be prior to itself. Every efficient cause has a prior cause and this cannot go on to infinity. Therefore, there must be a first efficient cause who is God.

The third way to demonstrate the cosmological argument is to approach it from the background of the notion of contingency. Certain things are found to come into being and be destroyed and hence they either may or may not exist. In this sense, they are contingent. But if all things were mere accidents, then nothing would actually exist, which is not true. Hence not all things are mere accidents. There must be one necessarily existing being, which is God. Again, every necessary thing must have a cause of its necessary existence. But the chain of causes cannot go back to infinitely. Hence there must be something necessarily existing through its own nature, not having a cause elsewhere but being itself the cause of the necessary existence of other things. This is God.

The Fourth Way to prove God's existence proceeds from the idea of the degrees of perfection. Aquinas says that, we find degrees of perfection among things. There are greater and a less degree of goodness, truth, nobility etc. These degrees are meaningful only in relation to something that is perfect: something that is the truest, the best, the most noble, and the greatest being. This is God, who is the cause of the existence of all things and of the goodness and perfection whatsoever.

Aquinas' fifth way is the argument from Design. He says:

We see that things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is obvious that they achieve their end, not fortuitously, but designedly. Now whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is directed by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God. [Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Article 3, Question 2]

The fifth way of proving God's existence thus argues that all natural objects are arranged according to a plan and there is something intelligent by which all natural things are arranged in accordance with a plan. This is God. God is thus the first mover, the first cause, the necessary being, the greatest being and the intelligent designer.

Quiz

1. Who among the following offered a Christian theology for the first time?
(a) St. Thomas Aquinas (b) St. Augustine (c) Apostle Paul (d) St. Francis
2. What was characteristic of Augustine's philosophy?
(a) Reason can comprehend God (b) Reason is incapable of comprehending God (c) God is not comprehensible by any means (d) God is known only through faith.
3. Which of the following is not held by Augustine?
(a) God has given reason to us (b) Reason is the eye of the soul (c) To have wisdom means to have God (d) Reason does not lead to God.
4. Reason, according to St. Thomas Aquinas:
(a) Has no important place in his scheme (b) Has been granted an ultimate status (c) Does not enlightens us about any aspects of reality (d) Cannot demonstrate the creation of the world in time.
5. According to Aquinas, Revealed theology:
(a) Can err and hence is imperfect (b) A genuine speculative science (c) Cannot prove the existence of Trinity, eternal life etc. (d) Deals with truths that can be relationally comprehended.
6. Which of the following proofs for God's existence if not advanced by Aquinas?
(a) From the idea of efficient cause (b) From the notion of contingency (c) From the idea of the degrees of perfection (d) From the idea of God as the greatest conceivable being.

Answer Key:

1. (c)
2. (a)
3. (d)
4. (d)
5. (b)
6. (d)

Assignments

1. Discuss St. Augustine's treatment of the problem of evil.
2. Discuss the two-fold theory of truth.
3. Explain the proofs for the existence of God advanced by Aquinas

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Chapter Eight

Modern Philosophy

Key Words:

Renaissance, Humanism, epistemology, rationalism, empiricism, knowledge.

Introduction

Philosophical movements are phenomena of effective history, says Habermas. (Habermas: Postmetaphysical Thinking). Modern philosophy is thus the result of several historical and social developments that had radical impacts in the lives of European people. The term modern comes from the Latin word *modo*, which means what is current. In this sense the term modern only suggests the separation of the contemporary age from the ancient. But when we speak about modern philosophy, we refer to certain developments in the field of philosophy, as a result of the impact of various other developments in culture and civilization happened during a specific period of time in European history.

This specific period has certain definite features which make it stand out clearly in the history of Europe. This period has witnessed a diminishing authority of the Church and an increasing authority of science. Europe had begun to define itself more on political and national lines rather than religious lines and States have started replacing the Church as authority that controls culture. The French and American revolutions which had very momentous impacts occurred during this time and nations were in the path of democratization.

From Ancient to Middle Ages

With the Barbarian invasion of the Roman Empire, an era of great ancient civilizations had come to an end in Europe. By the 5th century, Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman empire and the Church had become the most powerful organization in Europe [Lavine]. This has resulted in the complete domination of Christianity as an institution based on unquestionable faith and rigid dogmas in the place of the free, rational, independent philosophical thinking of the Greeks. Consequently, the Church had destroyed many writings and works of art of the ancient civilization charging them for being pagan, un-

Christian and immoral and had given birth to a new civilization with redefined social, cultural, economic and political domains all over the European continent.

The passage from the ancient Greek to Christian worldview was actually a retreat from the rational to supernatural and from the logical to the revelational. This period had replaced critical thinking with faith and loyalty to the doctrines of the Church. It therefore, replaced science by superstition. Most of the philosophical contemplations of this age were confined to the problems related to the rational justification of faith and God's existence.

Modern Philosophy

Bertrand Russell observes that the period of history which is commonly called "modern" has a mental outlook which differs from that of the medieval period in many ways. Of these, two are the most important: the diminishing authority of the Church, and the increasing authority of science. [*A History of Western Philosophy*].

An important historical event that has happened during this period in European cultural life was the advent of the Renaissance [the French word for rebirth]. It is generally accepted that the modern outlook began in Italy with Renaissance. The Renaissance actually consist in the revival of the ancient wisdom of the Greek and Roman civilization in the modern age. The intellectuals and creative artists of this period have recognized that the ancient wisdom of the Greeks and the Romans is the source of valuable insights that have the potential to change the course of human life in a drastic manner.

The term Renaissance stands for a period in European history spanning from the middle of the 14th century to the beginning of the 17th century. By 15th century the original Greek works were read and appreciated. Thinkers have also read critically appreciated and St. Thomas' interpretations of Aristotle. The recovery of the classical languages, literature, art, history and philosophical insights resulted in the revival of the spirit of Greek humanism, which considered the recognition of the dignity and worth of human beings as central. Humanism acknowledges the power of human reason to know the truths of nature and conceives humans as having the capacity to determine, express, and achieve what is good for us.

The Idea of the Good remained a core concern of the Greek civilization. The participation in the life of the city-states and the social and the political life that existed during that period determined the conception of the Good held by the Greeks. An entirely different conception of the good was prevalent during the Middle Ages, where to live according to the dictums of the Church was considered as primordial.

Renaissance, on the other hand, as we have seen above, consists in the revival of the ancient wisdom and humanistic spirit. It aimed at restoring to man the capacities, strengths and powers of the individual person which the middle ages had ignored. It has recognized the dignity of man in terms of his individual achievements, and not necessarily in terms of his divine allegiance. The Renaissance thus considered the culture of the ancient world as superior to the present one and had looked ahead to a new mode of life.

This period was also marked with the rise of modern science. Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton were the pre-eminent scientists of this era. Copernicus' heliocentric view of the universe has overthrown existing paradigms and Kepler came up with mathematical interpretations of the heliocentric view. Galileo developed the observation method with mathematical interpretations to new heights and with the emergence of modern science, the belief/faith-based world views were increasingly replaced by the reason-based scientific outlook. Copernicus and Galileo brought together the two important elements of scientific method: the empirical method that emphasizes on observation and experiment and the rational approach that uses the principle behind the mathematical deductive reasoning.

Philosophy during the Renaissance

Though Renaissance was a period that witnessed intense developments in many fields, it was not a very rich period for philosophy. This period had witnessed a revived study of Plato, over Aristotle. As Russell observes, Renaissance encouraged the habit of regarding intellectual activity as a delightful social adventure, not a cloistered meditation aiming at the preservation of a predetermined orthodoxy [*A History of western Philosophy*]

One major development happened during this period was the challenge Saint Thomas's interpretation of Aristotle faced from different quarters. Aristotle

was studied with more emphasis on secular and scientific aspects, independent of the dominant Scholastic interpretations. Platonism, Stoicism, Epicurianism and Skepticism were also reintroduced during this period. The authority of both the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire began to decline during this time and it encouraged having a new look at the philosophical issues, ancient philosophy texts and approaches. As T.Z.Lavine observes:

With the coming of the Renaissance there occurs an expression of a humanistic faith in man, in his power to direct his life and the life of his society toward freedom and justice, together with the sense that this power, which had been a possession of the individual in the ancient Greek world, had been lost in the world of medieval Christendom. [*From Socrates to Sartre: The Philosophical Quest.*]

Cultural Impact

Art and literature played a crucial role in forming the cultural and intellectual environment of this era. It was during this time both art and literature became independent of religious dogmas and mythology and artists exhibited the courage in portraying human glory and not just suffering and death as it used to be earlier. In other words, art and literature turned away from Christian themes to nature as it is seen and perceived by man. Nature became an interesting object of study and had been conceived not just as an expression of the supernatural. The human body has also become an object of artistic imagination as a result of the overcoming of the body-negativism that dominated European culture since the time of Plato and became strong during the middle ages.

This was also an age of scientific and other discoveries that enabled man's understanding the world with having better control over it. There were many new inventions and discoveries that enabled men to dominate nature, which also include other people in far away continents. The discovery of the New World by Columbus is an example. Along with such developments in the scientific, economic and political realms, Europe also witnessed the rise and growth of the Protestant reformation of Christian religion, sphereheaded by Martin Luther.

The philosophical temperament of this age was thus characterised by the scientific temper, humanism and skepticism. It was predominantly concerned with epistemological questions, which dealt with the sources, kinds and limits of human knowledge. In the ethical domain, it sought to discover the criteria and the possibility of moral life without religious principles. The modern age was

thus characterised by an awakening of the reflective spirit and the critical approaches that doubted and questioned all forms of authority particularly the authority of tradition. It was visibly against absolutism and collectivism and asserted the importance of freedom in thought, feeling and action.

In the political realm, states increasingly took the place of the Church and have moved more towards constitutionalism and the creation of more and more democratic institutions. Another important feature of this age was the emergence of individualism and an associated ideal of liberalism. Modern philosophy has emerged in such a social and political environment.

Modern Philosophy

The most important feature of modern philosophy is the emergence of reason as the sole arbiter in matters of knowledge and life. It becomes the only authority in philosophy and science and consequently the concept of truth was associated with the notion of scientific observation. Truth needs to be achieved through free and impartial inquiry and in this context theology, which considers revealed knowledge as paramount lost its importance. This age emphasized the practical applicability of knowledge.

In many respects, modern philosophy resembles ancient Greek thought. Like the latter modern philosophy too emphasized on an **independent search for truth** and was thoroughly **rationalistic**, as it considered human reason is the highest authority. It was **naturalistic**, as it attempted explaining the inner and outer nature without supernatural presuppositions. It was **scientific**, as it has very close ties with the new sciences that were emerging [Frank Thilly]

Modern Philosophy has also witnessed the emergence of two important epistemological schools of thought—rationalism and Empiricism—as independent and opposing schools of philosophy. The impact of modern scientific understanding on philosophy was quite visible, as both these schools were preoccupied with the question of rational genuine knowledge. With these two schools, philosophy regained its lost status as a foundational discipline. They have conceived and equated philosophy with epistemology.

With its focus shifting to epistemology, philosophy's objectives too had changed. It now no longer deals with the question of ultimate reality, as the ancient and medieval thinkers were doing. According to these thinkers,

philosophy deals with knowledge in a peculiar manner. While scientific disciplines are concerned with knowledge of a particular aspect or domain of the universe, philosophy deals with knowledge as such. Hence it is concerned with the nature, kinds, limitations and sources of knowledge.

Empiricism and Rationalism

Being the two important schools of modern philosophy, rationalism and empiricism have different and opposing conceptions of and views about the source of knowledge. Rationalism holds the view that genuine knowledge consists of universal and necessary judgements. According to them, the goal of thought is a system of truths in which the different propositions are logically related to one another. They thus advocate a mathematical conception of knowledge and hold that the origin of knowledge is not sense perception, but has foundation in thought or reason. The rationalists believe that certain truths are natural or native—innate—to reason and are *a priori*. They treat reason and intuition as the sources of genuine knowledge and not sensation and experience. Further they consider all or most ideas as innate rather than adventitious and hold that the goal of enquiry is certain knowledge and not something, which is merely probable. The founder of the rationalistic school, Rene Descartes (1596-1650) raised the question of knowledge in an unprecedented manner. He asked the question, “what do I really know?” and to find an answer to this he relies on his own intellectual resources. His method thus consists in the overcoming of skepticism and further aims at establishing the autonomy of science.

Empiricism, on the other hand, considers sense perception as the fundamental source of all knowledge, they intend to show that there are no inborn or innate truths and there are no propositions that yield necessary or absolute knowledge. John Locke (1632-1704), for instance, who is the founder of the British empiricist school, vehemently opposes the conception of innate ideas and asserts that all knowledge starts with experience. He claims that the human mind is a *tabula rasa* or an empty cabinet in the beginning and it is experience that will start writing on it.

Both rationalism and empiricism affirm that reason is a faculty of the mind through which truths about reality are known. With regard to the question of the source of knowledge they disagree. But neither of them affirms that all

knowledge comes from sense experience. Even the empiricists acknowledge that there is some knowledge that does not derive from experience.

Though the dominant philosophical schools in the modern age were rationalism and empiricism, other tendencies were also prevalent during this age. With the radical empiricist philosophy of David Hume, skepticism became prominent. Mysticism was another trend which dominated this age. The Catholic scholars preserved the Scholastic philosophy.

It will be interesting to have an account of the development of philosophy from the Greek golden age to the modern period. The decline of the Greek-Roman civilization was actually a decline of freethinking. As we have seen in a previous chapter, the emergence of the Christian Church as the highest authority that controls culture happened during the middle ages which are also called the dark ages.

Quiz

1. What characterized the ancient Greek civilization's conception of good life?
(1) The inculcation of the idea of universal goodness (b) The idea of divine will (c) The participation in the life of the city-states (d) The notion of *Eudeimonia*.
2. Renaissance consists in:
(a) The rejection of ancient wisdom (b) The revival of the humanistic spirit (c) The revival of the Christian belief (d) The assertion of the superiority of religious doctrines.
3. What is the most important feature of modern philosophy?
(a) Emergence of humanism (b) Emergence of individualism (c) emergence of reason as the ultimate criteria (d) The adoption of scientific method in philosophy.
4. What was the fundamental philosophical problem addressed by modern philosophers?
(a) Problem of knowledge (b) Problem of ultimate reality (c) The problem of good life (d) Ontological problems.
5. Which of the following view does the rationalists not hold?
(a) Knowledge consists of universal and necessary judgements (b) Mathematical conception of knowledge (c) Knowledge has its foundation in reason (d) All knowledge is a posteriori.
6. Who claimed that the human mind is an empty cabinet at the beginning?
(a) Descartes (b) Locke (c) Kant (d) Plato

Answer Key:

1. (c)

2. (b)
3. (c)
4. (a)
5. (d)
6. (b)

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Chapter Nine

Descartes: Method of Philosophy and Theory of Knowledge

Key Words:

Descartes, mathematical deduction, self-evident, indubitable knowledge, skepticism, methodological skepticism.

This chapter discusses the conception of knowledge advocated by Rene Descartes and the unique methodology adopted by him in attaining this knowledge. The thinkers of the modern age were naturally inspired by the success of the emerging new sciences. But as a philosopher, Descartes was more vigilant and approached the natural sciences with caution. He felt that it would not be possible for the natural sciences to claim absolute certainty owing to the fact that they depend upon the inputs received from the senses, which themselves are shaky and indeterminate. He examines the existing sciences and finds that it is the methodologically oriented approaches that distinguish them from other forms of knowledge and information gathering. But among the scientific disciplines, mathematics can claim absolute certainty and this owes to its unique methodology; the method of deduction. Mathematics begins with a set of self-evident axioms; the truth of which are never doubted as they are clear and distinct, absolutely certain and indubitable. Beginning with such self-evident and obvious axioms, mathematics deduces the rest of its knowledge from them, which by logical necessity, are also equally obvious, clear and distinct.

Since the reason for its certainty is the unique methodology adopted by mathematics, Descartes attempts to adopt a similar method in philosophy as well. The correct methodology of philosophy is expected to make it more accurate and ensure certainty. Descartes begins with doubting the existing methods adopted to gain knowledge in various disciplines; sense perception. He proposes to doubt everything that can be doubted and finally reach an indubitable truth, which would be the starting point of all knowledge in philosophy.

The Importance of Epistemology in Modern Age

Philosophy's primary objective in the modern period is to redefine itself as a foundational discipline that clarifies the fundamental questions about knowledge. Unlike ancient philosophy, it no longer deals with the question of ultimate reality and instead enquires about the nature, kinds, limitations and sources of knowledge. This change in emphasis was

fostered by the rise of modern science as a cultural institution. The rapid developments in modern science resulted in the decline of the Church's authority in European culture. Instead, scientific rationality now raises a strong claim of authority in culture and human life. Science exposed many dogmas that prevailed for centuries as unquestioned and the newly emerging scientific temperament reiterated the importance of not accepting anything as authority or as knowledge without questioning it. It asserts that nothing can be affirmed as true without critical examination.

The two important elements in scientific method are the empirical element and the rational element. The empirical or the inductive element relies on sense observation and considers observation as paramount in the process of knowledge acquisition. It considers the testimony of the senses—what is in front of us and is the most obvious—as valid source of knowledge. In this sense science is the extension of common sense. On the other hand, the rational element does not rely on empirical observation, but on the deductive counterpart of our reasoning process. Hence both the approaches adopted by empiricism and rationalism, which represent the inductive and deductive processes of reasoning respectively are combined in modern science for gaining genuine knowledge. These are two important schools of modern philosophy and their division is based on the answer they provide to the question of the ultimate source of knowledge. While the empiricists consider sense experience as the fundamental source of knowledge, rationalism affirms that all knowledge depends on the innate structures of the mind.

The rationalists in general affirm that genuine knowledge consists of universal and necessary judgements and argue that the goal of thought is a system of truths in which the different propositions are logically related to one another. In this sense they advocate a mathematical conception of knowledge. They argue that the knowledge has its origin, not in sense perception, but in thought or reason. According to them reason and intuition are the sources of genuine knowledge and not sensation and experience. Therefore, they assert that there are truths that are natural to reason and are therefore, a priori. Hence most of our ideas are native or innate rather than adventitious. René Descartes (1596–1650), Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) are the some important thinkers of the rationalist tradition.

The empiricists consider sense perception as the source of knowledge and reject the concept of inborn or innate truths. They affirm that there are no propositions that yield

necessary or absolute knowledge. John Locke (1632-1704), George Berkeley (1685-1753) and David Hume (1711-1776) were the prominent representatives of this tradition.

In spite of such differences in fundamental assumptions, both rationalism and empiricism consider reason as a faculty of the mind through which truths about reality are known. They only disagree with regard to the question of the source of knowledge. But neither affirmed that all knowledge comes from experience as even the empiricists acknowledge that there is some knowledge that does not derive from experience.

Rene Descartes : The Important Questions

Descartes primarily enquires how to attain philosophical truth by the use of reason. He asks the question; how do I get clear and distinct knowledge? His objective was to develop a system of true propositions in which nothing is presupposed which was not self-evident and indubitable. He thus envisaged developing a system of knowledge with solid foundations and therefore would be free from skepticism. In other words, Descartes aims at finding for philosophy the certainty of a mathematical proof. This system of philosophy would be based upon intuition and deduction which will remain as certain and as imperishable as geometry. He held a very comprehensive notion of philosophy that includes metaphysics, natural sciences, mechanics and morals.

Descartes, as mentioned above, was enquiring how to arrive at foundational beliefs which are clear and distinct. They are self-evident to reason and hence it is impossible to doubt their validity. Descartes held that the certainty of such a foundational belief must be ultimate and not dependent upon the certainty of any other beliefs. Again, it must be about something which exists so that it is possible to deduce from it beliefs about the existence of other things.

In order to arrive at such a foundational belief, Descartes proposes a method of doubt. He proposes to doubt everything that can be doubted in order to arrive at absolute certainty. In one sense, this approach is integral to modernity's critical spirit. It challenges old beliefs, systems and methods of knowledge. Descartes initiates what is known as methodical or methodological skepticism, which uses doubt methodically in order to arrive at true knowledge, which is beyond all doubt.

Before we proceed further, we may have to understand Descartes' conception of human knowledge and reason, which he believed can gain that knowledge. We have mentioned above that he subscribes to a very comprehensive notion of philosophy that includes metaphysics, natural sciences, mechanics and morals. Philosophy was treated by him as a study of wisdom and according to Descartes, all the sciences taken together are identical with human wisdom which always remains one and the same. He thus affirms that there is only one kind of knowledge. Ultimately there is only one science, though it possesses interconnected branches. Metaphorically we may conceive human wisdom as a tree, the tree of wisdom. These roots of the tree constitute metaphysics which form the foundations of human knowledge and from where it derives its nourishment. The trunk is constituted of physics and there are three branches, medicine, mechanics and morals, under which all other knowledge concerning of humankind can be subsumed.

We have to now see some of the basic assumptions about the concept of reason. The *Discourse on Method* affirms that reason or good sense is the most evenly distributed thing in the world. It is the ability to judge and distinguish the true from the false and this ability, according to Descartes, is equally distributed among all people. It is the only thing that makes us human and differentiates us from the animals and hence is entirely present in each of us. Descartes conceived reason as the means to acquire a clear and certain knowledge of all that is useful in life. He maintains that reason employs a definite method in its pursuit of knowledge. Descartes thus proposes to explore the nature of this method.

He says that philosophy consists of an organically connected system of scientifically established truths which are absolutely certain and clear. These truths are ordered where the mind passes from fundamental self-evident truths to other evident truths implied by the former. He then realizes that such truths are present only in mathematics and suggests a universal application of the method of mathematics, as there is only one science and the method must be common to all pursuits and intellectual enquiries that aims at attaining knowledge. Hence there can be only one scientific method, which is the method of mathematical deduction. In other words, since the method which is applicable in mathematics is the most rewarding method, it must be the method of all sciences.

Descartes' Approach

Descartes proposes to break with the past and start again from the beginning without trusting the authority of any previous philosophy. He exhibited a general disbelief with regard to the theories and methods of past philosophers, particularly the Greeks, the Aristotelians and the Scholastic thinkers. The main obstacle in the pursuit of knowledge is the lack of certainty in what we construe as knowledge. Most of our knowledge is based on uncertain assumptions, customs and conventions. And hence lack strong foundations. He thus proposes to systematically doubt all that could possibly be doubted. Descartes believed that this would take us to certain knowledge.

Descartes suggest not believing too firmly in anything of which I had been persuaded only by example and custom. He then says that, with this attitude he freed himself little by little from many errors, which can dim our natural light and even make us less able to listen to reason. He then turns his attention from studying the book of the world to the study of his own self. He says that he has used all the powers of his mind to choose the path he should follow, which, according to him was much more successful, than if he had never left his country or his books. Descartes thus suggests that the true method of enquiry should be introspective, where one turns to oneself and critically evaluates one's own contentions. He then discusses four important steps to be followed in order to arrive at the correct understanding of things.

1. Never accept anything as true which we could not accept as obviously true; to carefully avoid impulsiveness and prejudice, and to include nothing in our conclusions but whatever was so clearly presented to our mind that we could have no reason to doubt it.
2. Divide each of the problems we examine in as many parts as we could, as many as should be necessary to solve them.
3. Develop thoughts in order, beginning with the simplest and easiest to understand matters, in order to reach by degrees, little by little, to the most complex knowledge, assuming an orderliness among them which did not at all naturally seem to follow one from the other.
4. Make enumerations so complete and reviews so general that we could be assured that we had not omitted anything.

The Cartesian Meditations and the Method of Doubt

Descartes suggests six Meditations, each one dealing with a specific aspect of his methodology that ultimately resolve certain important problems a philosopher who considers

gaining absolutely certain genuine knowledge as his objective would encounter. The first Meditation outlines two stages in the method; the skepticism in regard to the senses and the refutation of radical skepticism. Here he proposes to doubt everything that can be doubted in order to reach the indubitable starting point of all knowledge. This starting point has been conceived as the foundation of knowledge. He thus decides to doubt everything that can possibly be doubted and had decided to get rid of all the opinions he had adopted so far about the world. On the constructive side, this endeavour aims at commencing anew the work of building from the foundation. Descartes thus wonders, whether he could doubt the fact that he is in the place where he finds himself, seated by the fire, clothed in a winter dressing gown, that he holds in his hands a piece of paper, with other intimations of the same nature. He speculates the possibility that he might be in a state of insanity with disordered brain and also the possibility that he might be dreaming, as one may get deceived in sleep by illusions. It is also possible that God may cause him to make mistakes or an evil demon may be misleading him. He doubts the existence of objects, which he perceives, and also the fact that he possesses any senses. He says that the body, figure, extension, motion, and place can all be merely fictions of the mind. Hence, the beliefs in the testimony of the senses and therefore, of the existence of material things or the physical world are suspended. This forces us to doubt the knowledge obtained by the natural sciences. Further the beliefs in mathematics, which is widely held as a domain of certainties, can also be doubted, as an evil demon may cause me to believe in them and consider them as certain.

After outlining the skeptical part of his method, Descartes now ventures to counter skepticism. He thus says that, though he can doubt many things and the existence of a world, which he experiences, the fact that he doubts is beyond all doubts. Hence he cannot doubt his existence, because in order to doubt, he should exist. Descartes thus says that, every time I doubt, I must exist to doubt and even if a being with the highest power and the deepest cunning, may be constantly employing all his ingenuity in deceiving him, I must exist, since I am deceived. The fact that I am in doubt cannot be doubted. I, therefore, exist, because I think: *cogito ergo sum*, I think, therefore I am.

The “I exist” therefore, is the absolutely certain, self-evident, and indubitable first principle. It is the only necessary truth. Descartes argues that, I think, I am, I exist, are necessarily true each time it is expressed by me, or conceived in my mind, as “I am” and “I

exist” are certain as often as I think. From this it follows that, if I cease to think, then I should at the same time cease to be.

To Descartes, the *Cogito* is self-evident to reason and indubitable and one cannot escape the *Cogito* by doubting it. Even to doubt it is to affirm it. According to Descartes, it is the most certain truth and the most ultimate truth and is not dependent on any other more ultimate truths, as it is not inferred from any other truths, but is from where every other truth is inferred.

In the next stage, Descartes focuses more on this *cogito* and attempts to understand its real nature. The only thing we can say about it is that it is a “thinking thing”. This is because, I know that I exist, only because I think. Hence Descartes concludes that, I am only a thinking thing, that is, a mind. The *cogito* is therefore, a thing that doubts, imagines understands, affirms, denies, conceives, perceives, wills, refuses etc.

Therefore, Descartes’ philosophy begins with an objective; to identify the foundations of genuine scientific knowledge. He thus advances a method of doubt, where he doubts everything that can be doubted, in order to arrive at the indubitable starting point of knowledge. The *cogito* is the starting point. But the *cogito* only proves the existence of the mind. Or more accurately, it proves my existence as a thinking thing. The existence of the mind is thus proved in the beginning. This in no way proves the existence of the world of objects. One can still doubt its existence. Descartes was aware of this difficulty and thought that if he could prove the existence of God, then he would be able to prove the existence of the empirical world of objects as well. In the next chapter we shall discuss these issues in detail.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is not true of Mathematics?
 - (a) It employs the method of induction
 - (b) It begins with a set of self-evident axioms
 - (c) its axioms are clear and distinct
 - (d) It employs deductive method
2. Which of the following is not true of modern philosophy?
 - (a) Primacy to epistemology
 - (b) Primacy to metaphysics
 - (c) Scientific temperament
 - (d) Critical spirit.

3. In Descartes' tree of human wisdom, the roots constitute of:
(a) Morals (b) Physics (c) Metaphysics (d) Mechanics.
4. What was the aim of Descartes' method of doubt?
(a) To arrive at the knowledge of things in the world (b) To arrive at clear and distinct knowledge about the mind (c) To separate the body from the mind (d) To arrive at the indubitable starting point of all knowledge.
5. Which of the following is not true of reason according to Descartes?
(a) The ability to judge and distinguish the true from the false (b) It differentiates us from the animals (c) The means to acquire a clear and certain knowledge (d) Some people are more rational than others.

Answer Key

1. (a)
2. (b)
3. (c)
4. (d)
5. (d)

Assignments

1. Discuss Descartes' conception of knowledge.
2. Explain the method of doubt as adopted by Descartes.

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Chapter Ten

Rene Descartes: The Mind-body Dualism

Key Words: methodological doubt, solipsism, God as deceiver, cosmological argument, argument from design, substance, attributes, modes.

There are two key ideas that are presented in the Discourse and elaborated in later works. First: human beings are thinking substances. Second: matter is extension in motion. Everything in his system is to be explained in terms of this dualism of mind and matter. If we nowadays tend naturally to think of mind and matter as the two great mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive divisions of the universe we inhabit, that is because of Descartes.

Anthony Kenny

This chapter begins with an examination of some of the implications of the methodological doubt articulated by Descartes, which concluded in the identification of the *cogito*. We have seen this in detail in the previous chapter. Descartes' philosophy identifies three fundamental substances, which he affirmed constituting reality; the mind, which is the thinking substance, God, the true substance and the body or material world. Everything else can be reduced either to the first or to the third.

As the previous chapter has elucidated, according to Descartes, a confirmation about the existence of the mind or thinking substance is the beginning of all knowledge. Once the existence of the thinking substance is confirmed without doubt, it becomes the starting point of the entire human knowledge, which can be derived from this primary certainty with the application of the method of deduction. As Descartes affirms, there is nothing more easily or clearly apprehended than my own mind.

The Threat of Solipsism

Cogito ergo sum prevents the systematic doubt from leading to skepticism by providing the starting point for all human knowledge. Nevertheless, this does not rule out the threat of solipsism. The cogito has proven that I exist as a mind with my own thoughts. But this does not rule out the possibility of my mind being the only real entity and the rest being nothing more than its creation. In order to overcome such solipsistic conclusions, Descartes has to demonstrate that something else exists besides his own mind and its thoughts. The sense experience assures of such a domain of reality. But Descartes' skepticism had already called into question its validity. He

now seeks another level of certainty that assures him that the *cogito* is correct when it has ideas.

Here also Descartes insists on the idea of certainty and affirms that what makes an idea true and certain is its clarity and distinctness. He derives his model of knowledge from mathematics. In order to be certainly true, ideas must be self-evidently clear and distinct like mathematical propositions. Even in mathematics there is a possibility that an evil demon or God deceives us. The case of sensible world or bodies is even more opaque. Hence our knowledge about everything else other than the mind's existence demands an even more certain assurance, which at the moment he is unable to conceive.

Existence of Material Objects

Does this mean that the existence of the thinking substance alone is certain? The skeptical method adopted by Descartes suggests not more than this. What about the existence of the material objects we perceive and the methodological skepticism had put on hold? Don't they also exist? To answer this question, Descartes further analyses what we normally understand as perceptual knowledge. He argues that, even in perception, it is the mind and not the senses that are active.

To demonstrate his argument Descartes takes up the example of a piece of wax. The wax has certain visible qualities; it tastes of honey, it smells of flowers, it has a certain sensible colour, size and shape, it is hard and cold, and if struck it emits a sound. But all these sensible features disappear once it is placed near the fire. Nevertheless, the wax persists.

Therefore, Descartes concludes that, what appeared to the senses was not the wax itself. The wax itself is constituted by several qualities like extension, flexibility, and motion, which are understood by the mind. Therefore, the wax itself is not sensible, as it is equally involved in all the appearances of the wax to the various senses. The perception of the wax "is not a vision or touch or imagination, but an inspection of the mind. Hence Descartes concludes that, external objects are not experienced by the senses, instead, they are "known" by the mind. The knowledge of external things must be by the mind and not by the senses and to think that my ideas are like outside objects is an error. In other words, Descartes maintains that material objects or bodies themselves are not properly perceived by the senses but by the

intellect alone. Bodies are not perceived because they are seen and touched, but only because they are understood by the mind. But, just because I perceive them I cannot be sure of them, as in such cases they may be just a dream or I may be getting deceived by God.

In this context Descartes makes an interesting deviation. He says that the existence of material objects presupposes proving the existence of God on the one hand, and proving that He is not a deceiver on the other. In other words, I can be certain of them only if I can prove that there is a God who is not a deceiver.

God and Certainty

With regard to the problem of knowledge, Descartes cites the principle that, only those ideas that are clearly and distinctively knowable are absolutely certain. The knowledge about the *cogito* is an example for such knowledge. The existence of the world of sensible objects still remains doubted. To proceed further, we have to now prove the existence of God; to be assured that God exists and He is not a deceiver, so that the world of objects are not unreal. Since God is the only substance in the real sense—as he alone subsists unconditionally and independently of everything else—I owe my existence as a thinking thing to Him.

Descartes thus proceeds with the proofs for God's existence with several arguments; most of them already present in the tradition, but with certain modifications. Scholastic thinkers like Saint Anselm and Saint Thomas have advanced what are known as the rational deductive arguments, which are based on reasoning from axioms which are self-evidently true. Descartes does not appropriate them unconditionally. He points out certain difficulties they lead us to and reject some of them. Certain other arguments he accepts with modifications.

Descartes disagrees with Saint Thomas' Cosmological Argument. He also distances from the argument from design, which conceives God as the first cause. This argument starts with the world and from its design and order infers the availability of a grand designer. Descartes finds this unacceptable, as doubting the existence of the world is primordial to his method.

Descartes undertakes the examination of the ideas the mind has. There are fundamentally three types of ideas. Some of them are innate to the mind, as they come from our own nature, and are known by the light of our own reason. The ideas of substance or thing, cause, existence, time, space, the basic principles of mathematics

and logic etc. are examples. Another set of ideas are factitious, which are invented by human imagination. The ideas of mermaids, unicorns, utopias, or future worlds are examples. The third type of ideas is adventitious. They are ideas which come from outside us, which nature seems to suggest to us, and which come despite our will. The hearings of a noise, seeing the sun, trees, or colors are examples.

But what are these ideas? What is their essential nature? As mentioned above, Descartes says that they are primarily present in our minds and hence we can say that they actually exist in our minds. They have actual or formal reality. One important feature of ideas is that they are always ideas of something, of objects. They represent or refer to objects and have objective reality.

Here Descartes takes up the idea of God for analysis. He argues that except for the idea of God all other ideas could be fictitious or my inventions. Following the traditional definition of substance—that which subsists independently of everything else—he affirms that God is an existent substance possessing all positive qualities in the fullest degree of reality. God is an infinitely perfect being and He possesses the positive qualities of goodness, knowledge, power, duration to their perfect degrees. With these basic formulations Descartes advances the first proof for god's existence.

First Proof for God's Existence

Descartes begins with the idea of God as a perfect being. We have a clear and distinct idea of God. He says that since something cannot proceed from nothing, there must be some cause of our idea of God. What is more perfect cannot proceed from the less perfect. There must be as much reality in the cause as in its effect. Therefore God, who is perfect, must be the cause of my idea of God as a perfect substance.

Second Proof for God's Existence

Descartes now raises the question of the cause of one's own existence. He asks what are the possible causes of his existence and argues that he himself cannot be the cause, as if he were the cause of his own existence, he would have made him perfect, since he has an Idea of perfection in his mind. And he is definitely not a perfect being; as he is unable to preserve himself, which a perfect being would be able to do. Therefore God as a perfect being exists as the only possible cause of my existence as a thinking thing.

Third Proof for God's Existence

This is the argument from the idea of perfection. Descartes argues that, all the properties he clearly and distinctly conceives to be possessed by God truly belong to Him. The clear and distinct idea of a perfect being includes the perfection of existence. To exist belongs to the nature of God as a perfect being. If God lacked existence He would be less than perfect. Perfection includes existence. Therefore, God exists.

God is not a Deceiver

In this connection he talks about the innateness of the idea of God. The idea of God is native to my mind and innate ideas are clear and distinct and are self-evident to the mind. Descartes then affirms that God is the cause of this idea. Other ideas like the ideas of cause, substance, logic, and mathematics are also imprinted on us by birth.

Descartes now explores whether physical substances exist independently of my mind. He wonders whether he can know the existence of physical substances with certainty and know what the properties of physical things are. He raises the following questions: Can I trust my senses? Is the idea of physical substance my own creation? Is God the cause of this idea?

While examining the cause of physical substances Descartes affirms that he himself cannot be their cause, as he is fundamentally a thinking substance. A thinking substance itself cannot be the cause of a substance which has extension as its essential property. The effect must be like the cause and hence the cause of the idea of an extended physical substance must be itself a physical substance. Hence they must be coming from outside of me. Moreover, God is not a deceiver. Since God exists and is infinitely good, He would not allow me to be deceived about everything that exists. Since God is good, He will not act like the deceitful demon. Therefore, God authenticates my sensory experiences. God has given me such a strong inclination to believe in bodies. If they actually do not exist, then God would be deceitful. Since that cannot be the case owing to the reasons cited above, bodies exist.

We thus come across two important aspects of Descartes' philosophy. The first aspect refers to the critical examination of our long held beliefs and assumptions and hence is thoroughly critical. He thus calls into question almost all traditional philosophical assumptions that were considered as the foundation for all philosophy, science and morality. But when he comes to advancing his own position, he seems to

be going back to the same old assumptions and beliefs he had criticized. Russell makes the following interesting observation.

The constructive part of Descartes's theory of knowledge is much less interesting than the earlier destructive part. It uses all sorts of scholastic maxims, such as that an effect can never have more perfection than its cause, which have somehow escaped the initial critical scrutiny. No reason is given for accepting these maxims, although they are certainly less self-evident than one's own existence, which is proved with a flourish of trumpets. Plato's *Theaetetus*, Saint Augustine, and Saint Thomas contain most of what is affirmative in the *Meditations*. [A History of Western Philosophy]

Substance, Attribute and Mode

Descartes' philosophy thus construes the existence of three Substances: God as the absolute substance, which so exists that it needs no other thing in order to exist and mind and body that are relative or dependent substances. This idea of substance is a very old philosophical assumption, which has its roots in the Greek tradition, and it had played a very important role in Scholastic thinking as well. Descartes subscribes to this concept and understands it in the same way in which the Scholastic philosophers conceive it.

Fundamental to the notion of substance is the idea of attributes or the essential characteristic or property of substance that which necessarily inheres in it. Substances are known through their attributes. It is the quality of a substance without which it cannot conceivably exist. For instance, according to Descartes, the mind has "thinking" as its attribute, as we cannot conceive it otherwise. That is the feature by which it distinguishes itself from other things. Similarly, the attribute of body is extension. All bodies are extended.

But the attribute of a substance can manifest itself in different ways or modes. There is an interesting correlation between the three; substances, attributes and modes. Modes cannot be conceived without substance and attributes and it is not possible for a substance to change its attributes, though it can change its modes. For example, according to Descartes, figure and motion are modes of extended substance or bodies and imagination or will are modes of thinking.

The Mind-Body Dualism

The theory of attributes and modes fundamentally justifies the separation of the entire human reality into two independent realms: the realm of the thinking mind and the realm of extended material objects. This dualism separates the mind from matter by

virtue of their different attributes. The mind has thinking as its attribute and it always thinks and is not extended. The Thinking Substance is the one that doubts, understands, conceives, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, imagines and feels. According to Descartes, thought includes everything that we term as consciousness. It is entirely different from the physical objects and is not part of nature. Instead, it occupies an independent territory and can exist without the body.

On the other hand, what we clearly and distinctly perceive in the body is extension or the spatial continuum of three dimensions constitutive of length, breadth and thickness. Other visible qualities like colors or tastes or odors are not necessary attributes of a physical substance, as it does not need all of them in order to exist. But they must necessarily have size and shape. Owing to its unique feature, the physical world exists as an independent realm with its own laws which can be explained in terms of mechanics. Since body is a relative substance to the absolute substance of God, it owes its existence to the latter. Descartes says that God created matter with motion and rest and the source of motion in the material world is God. He is the prime mover. Descartes further argues the amount of motion in the universe is constant, as God had given the world a certain amount of motion.

This mind-body dualism has very deep and far-reaching philosophical implications. They are conceived as diametrically opposite substances. Bodies are extended and are passive but cannot think. Minds can think and hence are active, but are not extended. Both domains follow their own independent laws. Owing to such a separation, nature and its workings can be explained purely in mechanical terms. Physics proceeds with its own laws and to understand the workings of the physical world, the laws of mechanics can be applied. Consequently, the human body and the bodies of animals, is conceived as a machine which follows the laws of mechanics. Heat in the heart is the moving principle, nerves are the organs of sensation and the muscles are the organs of motion. It functions like a machine.

Mind-Body Interaction

One of the major difficulties this Cartesian dualism faced is with regard to the explanation of the interrelationship between mind and body. If the mind and body possess diametrically opposite attributes, how can we explain their interaction? Logically speaking, there cannot be any interaction. Mind cannot cause changes in the body and body cannot cause changes in the mind.

But this is contrary to our experience. We find that there exists an intimate union between the mind and the body. They often compose a substantial unity. But the ultimate separation of the two substances in terms of their opposing attributes fails to explain this. For instance, if I were a merely thinking substance and if my mind is not intimately conjoined with the body, then when I am hungry, I may know that I am hungry but may not feel hungry. The question is, how does Descartes explain this situation?

Descartes here proposes a mind-body Interaction. He argues that, though possess diametrically opposite attributes, they are combined in man, in unity of composition and not in unity of nature. Sensations and feelings are disturbances in the mind resulting from its union with the body. Yet they remain distinct. A physical state neither becomes nor produces a mental state (and vice versa), but is troubled by it. There exists a form of causal interaction. Descartes conceives mind as having its principal seat in the pineal gland of the brain.

The model of interaction suggested by Descartes has cultural and political implications as well. It provides a model where the enmity between the new science and church and between rational knowledge and divine revelation can be resolved. It suggests a dualistic model where the physical substances and their laws (of motion) are controlled by science and mental substances, which are not causally determined, come under the Church. It thus suggests a compromise and reconciliation between the Church and the world of science. This reconciliation enabled the emerging modern age to conceive the progress and developments happen in science are not necessarily antagonistic to the doctrines of the Church.

The Cartesian dualism is one of the most controversial philosophical theories in the whole history of western philosophy. Once separated, Descartes himself as well as subsequent philosophers found it difficult to explain their apparent cooperation and unity. Different thinkers have come up with different explanations, but none could provide a satisfying solution to the separation of the world into two independent domains. Descartes has been criticized for this by many thinkers. But for a thinker who appeared at a time when the new sciences were about to introduce revolutionary changes in the relationship between man and the rest of the world and between man and man, the autonomy of the physical world and its status as an independent domain in its own right was essential.

Quiz

1. According to Descartes the following are the fundamental substances.
(a) Mind alone (b) Mind and body (c) God alone (d) Mind, body and God.
2. According to Descartes, the ideas of substance or thing, cause, existence, time, space, the basic principles of mathematics and logic etc. belong to which category of ideas?
(a) Innate ideas (b) Factitious ideas (c) Adventitious ideas (d) None of the above.
3. The mind and body constitute:
(a) Unity of nature (b) Unity of composition (c) Never united (d) United occasionally according to God's will.
4. What makes an idea true and certain is?
(a) The fact that it is being perceived by the mind (b) The fact that it represents something in the world (c) The fact that it is clear and distinct (d) The fact that it is not contradicted by another idea.

Answer Key

1. (d)
2. (a)
3. (b)
4. (c)

Assignment

1. How does Descartes prove the existence of the material world?
2. Explain the mind-body relationship according to Descartes.

Books

1. Copleston, Frederick, *A History of Philosophy*, vol.4: *The Rationalists Descartes to Leibniz*, London, Continuum, 2003.
2. Durant, Will, *A Story of Philosophy: The Lives and Opinions of the Greater Philosophers of the Western World*, Pocket Books, 1991.
3. Rogers, Arthur Keyon, *A Student's History of Philosophy*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1935.
4. Russell, Bertrand: *History of Western Philosophy*, London, Routledge Classics, 2004.
5. Thilly, Frank: *A History of Philosophy*, New Delhi, SBE Publishers, 1983.

6. Zeller, Eduard, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, London, Longmans, green and Co., 1881.

Web Resources

1. Important Arguments from Descartes' *Meditations*, available at :
<http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/dcarg.htm>.
2. “Descartes' Life and Works”, in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,
available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-works/>
3. “Rene Descartes”, available at:
<http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/philosophers/descartes.html>

Chapter 11

SPINOZA

Key Words: Spinoza, geometrical method, Substance, God, nature, attributes, mind, body, psycho-physical parallelism, pantheism.

Among all the modern philosophers, Spinoza occupies a unique position, not alone in terms of his extraordinary contributions to the world of philosophy, but also by distinguishing himself as a moral exemplar. Bertrand Russell considers him as the noblest and most lovable of the great philosophers, who might have been intellectually surpassed by some others, but remained ethically supreme. He lived a very simple life, almost like an ascetic sage, and insisted that like a true Jew, he would meet his personal requirements with an occupation that involved physical labour. He thus made his living by polishing lenses. However, he remained unorthodox in his philosophical and religious views, thanks to his predominant philosophical wisdom that made him one of the greatest minds in modern European philosophy.

His parents were originally from Portugal and had taken refuge in Amsterdam, where Spinoza was born in 1632. Though he was reared up in orthodox environment, Spinoza often expressed his doubts about accepted religious beliefs and practices. Spinoza's unorthodox views and approaches in philosophy not only gained him reputation, but also enemies and rivals who even attempted to physically annihilate him. The Jewish community to which he belonged initially tried to silence him through persuasions and then thorough threats and ultimately excommunicated him in 1656. Spinoza had enemies both among the Jews and the Christians, as these two religions held many common beliefs, which he questioned. Some of them even considered his views atheistic, while some others considered him primarily as a religious thinker. The poet Novalis has even given to him the name "God-intoxicated."

Spinoza had his early education much in the traditional lines and the elders in the community began to view him as a promising young Jewish scholar of faith. But Spinoza soon stumbled upon several issues and problems to which the answers given by Jewish scholars were far from satisfying him. He thus began to learn Latin to gain

an insight into the Christian tradition and such endeavours helped him to gain a thorough understanding of the Medieval European thought. He was significantly influenced by the Scholastic thinkers and owes to them for the geometrical method of exposition by axiom, definition, proposition, proof etc. (Will Durant: *A Story of Philosophy*)

Spinoza's Philosophy: Influences

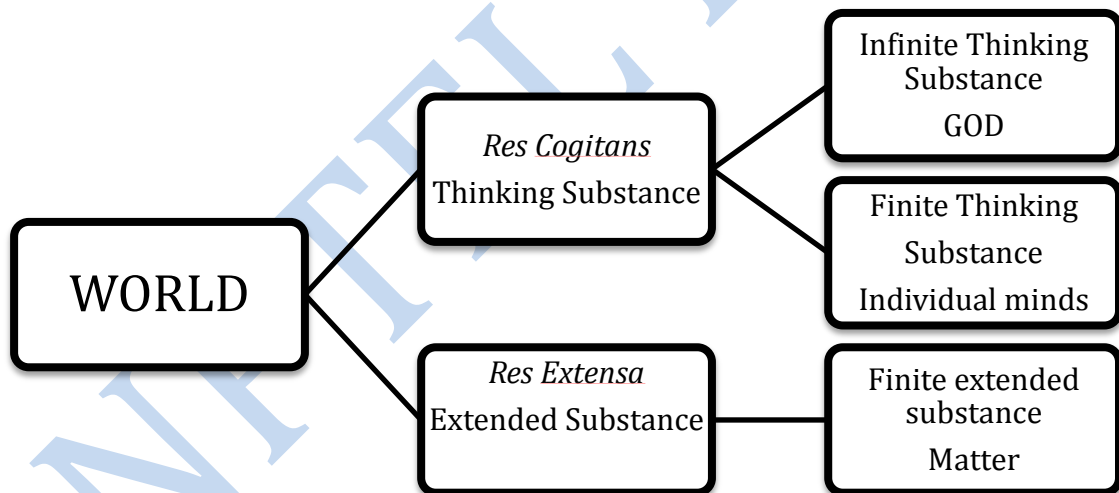
Spinoza was influenced by many of his predecessors, including the Greek masters, the scholastic philosophers and most importantly by Rene Descartes, who presented a picture of reality constitutive of three substances. According to the Cartesian picture, though there are three substances, God alone qualifies to be designated so in the true sense of the term, as substance is defined as something that subsists independent of everything else. In this sense, there can only be one substance and that is God. The two other substances—mind and matter that are created by him and therefore, he can annihilate them if he wishes so—are dependent on him and are termed as dependent or relative substances. God alone is substance in the absolute sense of the term. This conception of a homogenous substance has substantial appeal on Spinoza's thinking.

But, at the same time, Descartes maintains that the two relative substances of mind and matter, though are dependent on God, are independent of each other by virtue of possessing different and opposite attributes; thinking and extension respectively. This enabled Descartes to reflect the modern scientific temperament, which needed to assign a different domain for the material world—the world of the natural sciences, independent of the world of the mind or the spirit—with its own laws and principles. The Cartesian dualism, however, had given rise to several other dilemmas, as once separated them, Descartes was then in pains to explain their interrelationship. Nevertheless, the mind-body dualism helped explaining the workings of the material world and the domain of the body, independent of other metaphysical considerations that dominated human thinking during the scholastic age. Metaphors like “the body as a machine” had helped development of modern medical sciences in major ways.

But Spinoza had a different mission. Though he too represents the modern rationalistic spirit, his preoccupation was, as observed by Bertrand Russell, with questions related to religion and virtue. He attempted to bring ethical questions to the forefront of philosophy, while remaining faithful to a philosophical outlook that was

largely “modern” and would therefore, subscribe to a materialistic and deterministic physics advocated by Descartes and many other philosophers of that age. As Russell points out, Spinoza’s attempt was to find room for reverence and a life devoted to the Good within the framework of a materialistic and deterministic physics. [A History of Western Philosophy] In other words, he is attempting to bring science and ethics together, which seems to lie separate and often opposing to each other.

To understand Spinoza’s philosophical perspective, it is appropriate to begin with the philosophical position and approaches adopted by his immediate predecessor, Descartes, the father of modern philosophy. As shown in the figure below, reality for Descartes is constitutive of two kinds of substances; *res cogitans* or thinking substances and *res extensa* or extended substances. The former is further divided into infinite thinking substance or God and finite thinking substance or the individual mind(s).



But this theory of three substances further affirms the supremacy of God and in the true sense of the term He alone is substance. Minds and material bodies are dependent on God and hence are not real substances. They are relative substances and God has created them and can also annihilate them if he wishes so. Descartes also holds that, though mind and matter depend on God, they nevertheless are mutually independent. God is the creator of the world, which is constitutive of minds and matter. In this

sense He enjoys a distinct and different status. He is separated from and is different from both mind and matter.

This is one aspect of Descartes theory, which Spinoza found problematic. Cartesian dualism has amounted to the removal of God from the world and made the latter a far-away observer. The Cartesian paradigm has emptied the idea of God of any content and this has created several issues apart from the conceptual riddles created by the dualism of mind and body. Spinoza found that, the world, as it is constitutive of minds and bodies, needs a rational account for its existence as well as behaviour. There are several things in the world, which a dualistic framework fails to explain. Only with a notion of God, with the conception of a divine unity of things, we would be able to resolve these riddles. Hence, the immediate task before Spinoza is, how to reestablish the intimate connection between God and the world, which the Cartesian dualism has separated. He was attempting to interpret all reality in terms of God's ultimate perfection and unity. In other words, Spinoza was attempting to unify the apparently discrete and diverse things in this world, in terms of a principle that would logically establish the fundamental oneness of everything. For this he needs to establish the essential interconnectedness of things he sees around. The doctrine of infinite substance is introduced in order to explain this interconnectedness.

The doctrine of Infinite Substance

The world is not a collection of independent persons and objects, each of them complete in itself and real in itself. Such a proposition would make the world disintegrate in no time. No object can be understood in isolation and every object is connected with other objects. In this sense objects in this world form an endless series with necessary interconnections between them.

This necessary interconnectedness ultimately points to the ultimate unity of things. In this context Spinoza turns to Descartes whose concept of homogenous substance, he thought, would help resolving certain logical problems encountered while trying to comprehend the relationship between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Though he had reservations in accepting the dualism implicated in the Cartesian paradigm, he thought he could derive the existence of multiplicity of finite objects from this homogenous infinite substance. He thus begins his analysis of the concept of substance—a problem that occupied a

substantial part of his philosophical thinking—by asserting that there can be only one such Substance, which should logically be infinite. Reality cannot be constitutive of finite things, as the very definition of substance opposes such a postulation.

Substance is defined as: The conception of which does not depend on the conception of another thing from which it must be formed. In this sense it has to be necessarily infinite and boundless. Finite things are defined by their physical or logical boundaries and they are defined by what they are not. When we attribute certain qualities to an object and define it, we simultaneously assert that it is limited by those qualities. By being black in colour, for instance, the crow is qualified as a specific object, which is also not white not blue or any colour other than black. Hence the qualities and attributes of an object actually limit it to a certain kind. In this sense all determination is negation.

Therefore, anything finite is limited by some other thing of the same nature. If there are two things with the same nature, then they will have the same attribute. According to Spinoza, an attribute is that which the intellect perceives as constituting the essence of a substance. There cannot be two or more substances possessing the same attribute. If there were two or more of them, they would have to be distinguishable from one another in terms of the different attributes possessed by them. But instead if two substances possess the same attributes, then they possess the same essence and consequently they are not two, but one. Hence it is impossible to distinguish them. From this it follows that, if there are no two or more substances possessing the same attribute, and hence there is only one substance, then it should not be a limited or finite substance. Instead, it must be an infinite substance. In other words, substance must be homogenous and hence must be infinite and existent. It must be self-caused and self-dependent and single.

The Concept of Substance

The Substance is understood as that which is in itself and is conceived through itself. Consequently, it cannot have an external cause and it can be known through itself alone. In other words, it is the cause of itself and it is explained through itself and not by reference to any external cause.

In order to establish the idea of infinite substance Spinoza has to conclusively prove the impossibility of the plurality of substances. He points out that the existence of a plurality of substances needs to be explained in terms of the notion of cause. But this idea of causation imposes certain limitation on the substance as it makes the latter a dependent entity. Infinite Substance cannot be the effect of an external cause and hence it must be necessarily self-caused. It is understood purely through itself, as to conceive it as an effect of a cause is against the definition of substance, which is conceived as completely self-dependent. Spinoza adds that Substance does not depend on any external cause either for its existence or for its attributes and modifications and hence its essence involves its existence. Since existence belongs to the nature of substance, its definition necessarily involves existence. Hence Spinoza concludes that from the mere definition of the Substance, its existence can be ascertained.

Spinoza's Method

Russell observes that Spinoza's *Ethics* is a very unique work in many senses. It is set forth in the style of Euclid, with definitions, axioms, and theorems; everything after the axioms is supposed to be rigorously demonstrated by deductive argument. (*A History of Philosophy*) We have seen earlier that one important issue with which philosophers of the modern age were preoccupied was devising the right method that embodies human rationality and therefore systematically taking us to knowledge and truth. Spinoza was not an exception as he too was significantly influenced by the modern scientific temperament and by the certainty and accuracy promised by the mathematical sciences. Here the influence of Descartes is apparent. But unlike Descartes who employed the mathematical deductive method, Spinoza adopts the geometrical method in philosophy.

As a science geometry deals with eternal truths about spatial relations that are deduced from self-evident premises. Spinoza contended that philosophy too should follow a similar method. Guided by the idea of self-evident truth, he affirms that the most self-evident thing is the existence of a homogenous, infinite substance, which is God, whose essence involves its existence. He then argues that from the definition of God itself, his attributes are to be derived and further from the attributes of God, other lesser truths are derived. His system thus presents a logically connected system where its elements are connected with

each other not in terms of causal relationships, but of logical interconnectedness. Extending this insight to our understanding of the world implies that the connections in the world are not to be understood in terms of cause and effect, but it needs to be explained as a matter of logical dependence.

The Doctrine of Attributes

The doctrine of attributes plays an important role in Descartes's philosophy, as the notion of substance naturally calls for its attributes by means of which it can be distinguished and without which it cannot be conceived. Descartes thus introduces a distinction between the mind and the body—the two dependent substances in his scheme—on the basis of the doctrine of attributes. In other words, this doctrine has ultimately led to construing the dualism of mind and body. Ever since he identified the cogito as the starting point of his philosophy, the distinguishing feature of the cogito, as its attribute needs to be conceived. Later, when the body was accommodated into the ontological scheme, it was conceived as possessing the attribute of extension. These two attributes of thinking and extension are entirely different from each other, and hence the two substances of mind and body are also separated for ever.

This dualism introduced several conceptual difficulties in Cartesian thought. Descartes and his followers were occupied with such problems in a major way and the Cartesian framework fails to provide a satisfactory solution to this problem.

Since Spinoza's treatment of the concept of Substance is different—as he refuses to admit a dualistic scheme and envisaged a homogenous and single Substance—his doctrine of attribute too is bound to be different. He begins with the assumption that the more reality or being a thing has, the more attributes will it have. Therefore, the infinite substance must have infinite attributes. Spinoza's doctrine of attributes thus envisions the infinite Substance possessing infinite attributes, each of them expressing the eternal and infinite essence of the homogenous Substance. Descartes' theory has recognized only two attributes of thinking and extension and Spinoza argues that they are the two attributes which the human intellect is capable of knowing. Owing to its essential finite nature, the human intellect cannot grasp all the attributes of the infinite Substance.

This position enables Spinoza to solve the problem Descartes faced while he visualized the dualistic scheme. The latter was worried about the problem of interaction between the two substances which are entirely different from each other, owing to their diametrically opposite attributes. Spinoza resolves the paradox with a doctrine of psycho-physical parallelism. He contends that the attributes of thought and extension are not two separate things, but are only aspects of one and the same thing. He argues that, for each mode of thought a mode of extension will exist. Finite minds are modes of God under the attribute of thought and finite bodies are modes of God under the attribute of extension.

Spinoza's Doctrine of Attributes

While Descartes' dualistic scheme distinguishes the world as an extended substance from the thinking substances (God and mind), Spinoza dissolves all such separations with his idea of infinite homogenous Substance or God. For Descartes, God is the cause of the external world of extended substances and He remains distinct from the latter. He maintains that God, who is an external cause of the world, has caused motion in the world and has fixed the amount of motion constant. According to him, motion-and-rest is the fundamental mode of extension and understanding or apprehending is the fundamental mode of thought.

Spinoza rejects all such distinctions. He maintains that there is no external cause to nature and it is not different from God. Motion and rest are only the logically prior state of substance under the attribute of extension. The universe or world is ultimately not different from God who is the infinite substance with infinite attributes. Hence God and nature are not distinct. Since there is no external cause that create motion in the natural world, movement must be a characteristic feature of nature itself. In other words, there is no cause distinct from nature that can confer or impress movement upon nature.

Hence Spinoza's Pantheism is both similar to and different from Descartes' view. Like the latter, he too conceives that motion-and-rest as the fundamental mode of extension and as constituting the primary characteristic feature of the extended nature. Again with Descartes he agrees that the total proportions of motion-and-rest remain constant in the world. But unlike his predecessor he contends that the physical universe is a self-contained system of

bodies in motion and the total amount of motion-and-rest or energy is the infinite and eternal immediate mode of God or nature under the attribute of extension. Nature is a spatial system or system of bodies which is the mediate infinite and eternal mode of God or Nature under the attribute of extension.

Thinking, on the other hand, is absolutely infinite understanding and is the immediate infinite and eternal mode of God or Nature under the attribute of thought. Our mind is an eternal mode of thinking and Spinoza argues that this is determined by another mode of thinking, and this one again by another, and so on to infinity. Ultimately everything belongs to the system of the totality of being which is the infinite God. Hence, the attributes of thought and extension are attributes of the same substance or different aspects of the one substance, which is the eternal and infinite intellect of God.

Psycho-Physical Parallalism

The doctrine of psycho-physical parallelism is Spinoza's solution to the problems created by separating the mind from the body. As discussed above, his doctrine of attributes conceives that God, who is the infinite Substance, has infinite attributes, each expressing the infinite essence of the former. He further adds that, among the infinite attributes of God, thinking and extension are the two, which the human intellect can comprehend.

Spinoza further states that for each mode of thought a mode of extension exists. Thought can only be explained by reference to the thought series and extension by reference to other modes of extension. He maintains that, a mode of extension, and the idea of that mode, are one and the same thing, expressed in two different ways. We can conceive nature under the attribute of extension or under that of thought, both following one and the same order. Both also follow one and the same concatenation of causes and ultimately point to the infinite Divine Substance or God.

Quiz

1. Spinoza's major preoccupations were withproblems.
(a) Metaphysical (b) Epistemological (c) Ethical (d) Political
2. Spinoza's Substance is not:
(a) Heterogeneous (b) Homogenous (c) Self-caused (d) Eternal.
3. Spinoza adoptsmethod in philosophy

- (a) Natural scientific (b) Inductive (c) Mathematical (d) Geometrical.
4. How does Spinoza account for God-nature relationship?
(a) God created nature (b) They are not different (c) Nature is a mode of God (d) They are inseparably related.
5. Spinoz's solution to the mind-body dualism is:
(a) Psycho-physical parallelism (b) Interactionism (c) Pre-established harmony (d) Dualism

Answer Key:

1. (c)
2. (a)
3. (d)
4. (b)
5. (a)

Assignments

1. Discuss psycho-physical parallelism.
2. Describe the concept of substance, outlining how does Spinoza's position differs from Descartes'.

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Chapter 12

Spinoza's Pantheism: God and Nature Relationship

Key Words: Spinoza, pantheism, God, nature, Substance, intellectual love of God, *Natura Naturans*, *Natura Naturata*.

Spinoza advocates an extremely unorthodox conception of God. He derives it from his concept of Substance, employing the geometrical method that relies on self-evident axioms and those propositions logically deduced from them. Naturally, his views have attracted criticism and the wrath of the established orthodoxy. With his extreme emphasis on logical relationships and necessity Spinoza's conception of God would have looked excessively intellectual. He even talks about a concept called the "intellectual love of God". But, on the other hand, this emphasis on logic forced him to conceive a highly unique pantheistic conception of God, the world and their interrelationship.

What makes Spinoza unique is his personal commitment to his philosophical theories. In his personal life, Spinoza remained highly committed to his theories and philosophical assumptions, as his life and death exhibited exemplary and exceptional simplicity, modesty and courage, which are seen only in people with high moral character. The purpose of philosophy for him was to arrive at a clear and correct understanding about oneself and about God, which would enable one to lead a fearless life. Spinoza holds that philosophical wisdom liberates man from the fear of death and enables him to meditate on life. Russell observes that Spinoza lived up to this precept. He adds that even in the last day of his life Spinoza remained entirely calm and not exalted. Like Socrates he went on conversing, as he would on any other day, about matters of interest to his interlocutor. Russell observes that, unlike some other philosophers, he not only believed his own doctrines, but practiced them. (*A History of Western Philosophy*)

Though he talks about the intellectual love of God, this love is not exclusively intellectual, as the term is normally understood; as different from experiential or indifferent to one's personal life. He firmly believed that the mind's highest good is the knowledge of God, and hence its highest virtue is to know God. Spinoza says that to know God is to love God and it also consists in having a perspective of the whole, as God encompasses everything. This would also enable us to understand ourselves

and our emotions and passions, so that we can direct our attention to the adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God.

Spinoza thus proceeds from the definition of Substance given by Descartes and also by the Scholastic thinkers and following its implications reaches a notion that concludes that there cannot be anything else other than God and nature cannot be different from God. But before we trace this pantheistic conclusion let us see the way he evolves this notion from the ancient concept of Substance: God as the only Substance.

God as the Only Substance

As indicated above, Spinoza was influenced by the Scholastic thinkers and more specifically by Descartes, in construing his notion of Substance. He defined Substance in the following way; “the conception of which does not depend on the conception of another thing from which it must be formed.” Spinoza affirms that, if this is true, then there can be only one Substance. Here he agrees with Descartes, who held a notion of homogenous Substance. He thus subscribes to certain traditional descriptions of God, where the latter is understood as infinite being, infinite substance, unique, eternal and simple.

These similarities apart—largely an agreement following from the definition of the term Substance—Spinoza’s position is drastically different from the Scholastic and the Cartesian views. This is more evident if we examine the God-world relationship. At the outset, Spinoza argues that both Scholasticism and Descartes fell short in understanding the implications of conceiving God as an infinite being or substance, though they too held such a view. As they have argued, Substance cannot but has to be infinite. But such a notion of infinite Substance insists that there should not be anything else existing other than it, as if anything else exists independent of it, then it is not infinite in the true sense of the term. Finite things are not absolutely independent, though they may be independent of each other (as conceived by Descartes). They must be at least dependent on God, otherwise they cannot be treated as finite. God is present in all finite things, upholding them in existence.

Spinoza takes off from these assumptions about the infinite substance and the so-called finite substances. He affirms that the independent identities of finite substances cannot be final and absolute. They cannot be absolutely independent of God who is infinite. Hence Spinoza argues that they must be in God. Spinoza holds a

more radical account of the God-world relationship. According to him all finite beings are modifications of God and nature is not and cannot be ontologically distinct from God. The infinite God comprises in Himself all reality. Spinoza underlines the fact that, logically, by virtue of its definition, there can be, or be conceived, no substance other than God. Everything that exists is either God or a mode of God or Substance which consists of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence exists.

Following his predecessors, Spinoza too provides proofs for the existence of God. His first proof demonstrates God's existence in the following lines. If God does not exist, then God's essence does not involve existence. But God is a Substance and the essence of a Substance does involve existence. Hence God exists. In the second proof he argues that if God does not exist, then there should be some reason or cause that prevents God from existing. But, then logically that reason must be of the same nature of God, since things of distinct nature have nothing in common. If that reason that has the same nature of God prevents God from existing, then there is some aspect of God's nature that prevents God from existing: which is a contradiction. To affirm contradiction to a being, who is absolutely infinite and in the highest degree perfect is absurd. Therefore, God exists without any doubt.

But this god of Spinoza is not the god of religious traditions, particularly the Judaic and Christian traditions that believe in a personal God and His prophets. Spinoza holds a pantheistic view about God and God-nature relationship, which is very close to the picture held by some Indian philosophical traditions.

Spinoza's Concept of God

As mentioned above, Spinoza's notion of God is different from the personal God of religions and theology. Like the *Advaita Vedantins* of India, he holds that individuality or personality imply determination or limitation. Owing to the fact that God is absolutely infinite, there cannot be anything external to God and independent of him and hence God cannot be conceived as acting according to ends or purposes beyond himself.

This is against the ordinarily held notions of God where believers ascribe to Him, will or intellect. The dominant view—subscribed by the Catholic Church and many other religious and philosophical traditions in the west—holds God as the first and only free cause and the essence of all things as of their existence. According to

this view, God is conceived as a regulating force of the universe and human life and He is the personal creator of everything.

Spinoza argues that, such conceptions of God are due to the essential limitations of the human mind. We seek (human) meaning in a world around us and find it in a conception of God as creator, regulator and designer. But in actuality, God must be beyond all such attributes and all limitations. Underlying such popular conceptions of God is the notion of a moral governor; the idea of the government of the world according to a purpose. This is to conceive God as being who can think or plan and decide act according to conscious purpose and design. Spinoza reminds that all determination is negation and intelligence or will cannot be attributed to God who is not a person. God is not a mere puppeteer who controls the world by pulling strings. We cannot attribute causation to him, as He does not belong to nor can be confined to a causal nexus. He is not an outer cause of the movements of things that exists independent of them. Nor is he a person who looks outside of Him to a world and model his actions accordingly. All such conceptions lead to attributing limitations to God who is absolutely limitless and infinite.

Again, Spinoza is against the idea that God does everything for the sake of the good. Such a notion is important to the Christian theological conception, which has the dichotomy between good and evil at its center. Another important concepts are the idea of sin and the notion of freedom of will. For Spinoza all these are the result of a limited vision; our inability in understanding the infinite perfection of God. It is again a human attempt to attribute our meanings to what we see around.

Spinoza, on the other hand, holds a different notion of control and states that God controls the world through natural laws. He affirms that everything in the material world happens through necessity. God is the inner cause of everything that happens in nature and hence He cannot be different from nature. He is not an external transcendent cause acting on nature from without but is the immanent principle of the world.

This view undercuts the idea of God as a moral governor, who operates with the notions of sin, freewill, goodness and evil. Instead of the idea of conceiving the world as being designed according to the rules of a divine power and regulated by a intelligence, Spinoza introduces the notion of logical necessity and states that there is nothing contingent in the nature of things. Whatever happens is part of the eternal timeless world as God sees it. All things are determined by the necessity of divine

nature for existing and working in a certain way. God necessarily causes the contingent finite things and everything is ruled by an absolute logical necessity. There is no free will in the mental sphere, as that would make the mental superior to the physical, while both are the attributes of the infinite God who is the only Substance. Everything that happens is a manifestation of God's inscrutable nature and events are what they are necessarily and they cannot be otherwise. Real wisdom consists in viewing the world as God sees it; under the aspect of eternity. Spinoza holds that everything is fixed and certain in this universe and future is also fixed as the past. We cannot alter it with our actions.

With these fundamental postulations Spinoza questions some basic assumptions of Scholasticism and Christian theology. If there is no free will, then how can one account for a notion of sin? Spinoza's view will also undercut the good and evil dichotomy and will also overthrow the idea of personal immortality. He holds that, concepts like evil, sin and free will are human inventions that aim at making sense of the workings of the universe by attributing human meanings to them. Evil and sin are negative concepts that cannot have place in the world which is not different from God. All that is negative exist only from the point of view of finite creatures and there are no negations in God. Spinoza asserts that, viewed from the perspective of the whole evil and sin does not exist. The good-evil dichotomy is a false dichotomy and they are not element in things. There is no good and evil in themselves. They are only modes of thinking and are mere subjective notions. One and the same thing can be at the same time good, bad, and indifferent. Hope and fear of Christianity are the result of viewing the future as uncertain. It is the result of a lack of wisdom.

Personal Immortality

The concept of personal immortality is one of the central doctrines of Christianity. Spinoza rejects this notion and proposes an impersonal idea of liberation. He advocates a notion of liberation that consists in becoming more and more one with God. There cannot be anything different from God. Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can exist or be conceived without God. This is the primary statement of a pantheism, which Spinoza would develop further to its logical conclusions. In this sense, Spinoza conceives all finite beings as modifications of God. And the truly infinite God comprises in Himself all reality. He thus insists that nature too, which is

obviously finite, not ontologically distinct from God, but is one with it. God is nature and nature is God.

Pantheism of Spinoza

One of the most striking aspects of Spinoza's philosophy is his conception of God, which begins with his elaboration of the Scholastic and Cartesian conceptions of Substance to its logical extremes where nothing else but Substance or God alone exists. This position raises certain important questions concerning the world, the mind and body relationship (as the world is divided into the mental and spiritual substances), the relationship between man and God, human destiny and liberation. Spinoza's pantheism is an answer to all these questions.

Spinoza categorically asserts that God is the source of everything that is and He is the immanent principle of the universe. This leads to the identification of God with the world: God is the world and the world in Him or God and the world are one. Understood in this sense, God is not a mere creator of the world, who has created it and remains separated from it. He is the permanent substratum or essence in all things and the active principle or source of all reality.

To account for the relationship between God and nature Spinoza introduces two terms: *Natura Naturans* and *Natura Naturata*. The Latin term *Natura Naturans* means nature naturing, or nature doing what nature does. The term *naturans* is the present participle of *natura* and *Natura Naturans* refers to the self-causing activity of nature or nature in the active sense. It is nature in itself and is conceived through itself.

On the other hand, the term *Natura Naturata* refers to the plurality of objects. It stands for the effects or products of the principle and in this sense nature is considered as a passive product of an infinite causal chain. It is whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, or from God's attributes. All the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God constitute *Natura Naturata*.

With his pantheism Spinoza presents a logical theory of God derived from the notion of substance and relates it with the way things actually exist in the world and as we humans experience them. This theory would be complete only with an explanation of the notions of bondage and liberation, which Spinoza describes with the idea of an intellectual love of God.

Bondage and Freedom

Though from the outset it looks very logical and mathematical, Spinoza's philosophy is fundamentally ethical and religious. He postulates that the goal of every individual is the attainment of perfection or happiness and this consists in knowing God. In this sense, the ultimate human goal is to know God. To know God is the mind's highest good and highest virtue and the aim of philosophy is to facilitate this.

Spinoza affirms that the human mind has an adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God. But various passions distract and obscure the mind's intellectual vision of the whole. He says that all the so-called wrong actions are due to such an intellectual error. We are in bondage in proportion as what happens to us is determined by outside causes. Hence what is aspired is a maximum degree of self-determination. What hampers this is the fact that we are controlled by our emotions. Hence bondage refers to our inability in freeing ourselves from emotions. This freedom can be attained only with the employment of reason.

Spinoza holds that to lead a rational life is to seek what is useful to oneself, which again means, to live and preserve one's being. This is what is virtuous to an individual. Hence to act according to virtue is to act under the guidance of reason. Emotions are hindrances to this form of virtuous life. He holds that emotions that spring from inadequate ideas are passions which are more detrimental. According to him, passions are those emotions in which we appear to ourselves to be passive in the power of outside forces and hence to overcome them is to overcome ignorance and evil.

The first step to attain this is to form a clear and distinct idea about our emotions, by listening to the voice of reason and understanding. This is to understand that all things are necessary and nothing in this world is accidental. Here one has to clearly and distinctly understand oneself and one's emotions. This is what Spinoza refers to as loving God. For him it is an intellectual love, which sees things as *sub specie aeternitatis*, or things as contained in God. This is to see things as following from the necessity of the divine nature and not conceiving them as separate from God. Things are conceived in their relation to the infinite causal system of Nature and as part of the logically connected infinite system.

In this sense, to know God is to conceive us and other things as part of the logically connected infinite system. Spinoza holds that from this knowledge arises the

pleasure or satisfaction of mind. This conception leads to another idea which is central to Spinoza's theory; the intellectual love of God.

Intellectual Love of God

The knowledge that we are part of the logically connected infinite system leads to pleasure. And this pleasure accompanied by the idea of God as eternal cause is the intellectual love of God. This is intellectual and not emotional, as it emanates from an understanding of the nature of the infinite God. This love also leads to the understanding about one's place in the infinite system and the place of others. Hence the love of God for men and the mind's intellectual love towards God is one and the same thing.

Spinoza affirms that this love towards God must hold the chief place in the mind. This is the understanding of everything as part of God. This is the intellectual love of God where the union of thought and emotion takes place. In this intellectual love the apprehension of truth, or the whole happens. In such an apprehension, nothing negative is contained, as nothing can be negated from the whole.

Spinoza says that this understanding involves a peculiar form of joy, which is not a mere emotional pleasure. He argues that when all objects are referred to God, the idea of God will fully occupy the mind. The intellectual love of the mind towards God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself. This according Spinoza is the inevitable consequence of us acquiring understanding. Logically, argues Spinoza, no one can hate God as that leads to self-hatred. Again a man who loves God cannot want God to love him, as he would then know that God has no passions or pleasures or pains and God loves and hates no one. If a man who loves God and wants God to love him, then he would desire that God, whom he loves, should not be God, which is logically absurd.

Quiz

1. What according to Spinoza is the mind's highest good?
(a) The knowledge of the world (b) The knowledge of God (c) The knowledge of Human mind (d) The knowledge of our passions.
2. According to Spinoza all finite beings are:
(a) Attributes of God (b) Different from God who is infinite (c) Striving to become God (d) Modification of God.

3. Which of the following is not applicable to Spinoza's concept of God?
(a) God is absolutely infinite (b) There cannot be anything external to God
(c) God is the personal creator of everything (d) God acts according to ends or purposes beyond himself.
4. According to Spinoza how Does God control the world?
(a) Through moral governance (b) Through the idea of good (c) Through natural laws (d) Through moral commandments.
5. Which of the following does not happens in the intellectual love of God?
(a) Negation of all that is negative (b) A union of thought and emotion
(c) An apprehension of the whole truth (d) Realization that one is part of the logically connected infinite system

Answer Key

1. (b)
2. (d)
3. (c)
4. (c)
5. (a)

Assignment

1. Describe Pantheism.
2. Explain the concept of the "intellectual love of God".

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Chapter 13

The Philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz

Key Words: monad, monadology, pre-established harmony, force, metaphysical point, windowless, queen monad.

Introduction

Leibniz's (July 1646 – November 1716) philosophy is unique for many reasons. He is the third among the three great rationalists who have immensely contributed to the development of Modern philosophy. His Monadology attempts to solve some of the problems the concept of substance has generated in the Rationalist school and it also tries to solve the problem of mind-body dualism. He provides a very innovative account of the idea of God with his idea of pre-established harmony.

Leibniz who was primarily known as an outstanding mathematician was born in July 1, 1646, in Leipzig. His early education was in Germany in a neo-Scholastic Aristotelian philosophy. When he went to Paris he was introduced to Cartesianism and the materialism of Gassendi. In 1676 he met Spinoza and had discussions. Though this incident was very important in his career, he refused to admit the influence of Spinoza on his work.

Overview of Leibniz's Philosophy

Like both of his predecessors, Descartes and Spinoza, Leibniz too began his philosophical contemplations with the problem of Substance. Different accounts of mind-body relationship and the number of substances were prevalent during that time, though none of them could satisfactorily solve the problem.

One issue with which his philosophy was dominantly preoccupied with was the concept of harmony. He introduces the concept of God in this context and conceives the latter as a being who is responsible for the harmony exhibited by the universe. In other words, he advocates the notion of pre-established harmony, a harmony that has been instituted by God in the beginning. Leibniz thus tries to reconcile the speculative theology of the Scholastic thinkers with the rational modern philosophy and science of his age. He believed that the universe is a harmonious whole which is governed by mathematical and logical principles.

With regard to the number of Substances, he adopts a different position from both Descartes and Spinoza. Descartes, as we have seen in an early chapter, had postulated God as the only true Substance and conceived mind and body as dependent substances. The division between mind and body was maintained by virtue of their attributes; thinking and extension respectively. Spinoza on the other hand affirmed that there is only one substance which is infinite in itself and which possesses infinite attributes. He thus attempts to reunite the body and mind which were separated by Descartes, which generated many conceptual issues in the intellectual history of the West.

Leibniz accepted Descartes' mechanistic explanation of the physical world, which explained the independent functioning of the physical universe. Such a philosophical perspective was advantageous for an emerging modern science that was seeking an account of the functioning of the physical universe, independent of the psychic or spiritual principles. But at the same time he found the embedded dualism in the Cartesian philosophy as inherently problematic. On the other hand, he was also unhappy with Spinoza who does not recognize the reality of individuals. He criticized Spinoza for rejecting teleology or purpose, as for Leibniz working for ends is important in practical life. Again he held that to conceive Substance as both extended and unextended, as Spinoza did is a contradiction.

Leibniz's major point of departure from Descartes happens when he discusses the notion of extension, which is conceived as an attribute of the material substance by Descartes and of God by Spinoza. Descartes conceives matter as extended substance and as inherently passive and inert and hence as receiving motion from without. Leibniz, on the other hand holds that, extension is not an attribute of Substance, as it involves plurality and hence only belong to an aggregate of substances. Descartes held that the quantity of motion in the universe is constant. Leibniz questions this and wonders what happens when bodies come to rest and bodies begin to move. We cannot hold that motion seems to be lost and gained on such occasions, as it would then violates the principle of continuity, which holds that nature makes no leaps. He thus argues that, there should be a ground of motion, which is force, or *conatus*. Force, according to him, is the tendency of the body to move or to continue its motion.

Leibniz thus maintains that every substance is an expression of force. He thus equates body or matter with an unextended center of force. Hence for him matter is not just a mere passive lump of extended substance, but is force. It does not exist by virtue of extension, but extension exists by virtue of body or force. Extension is the phenomenal way in which matter

appears to us. It is not the attribute of matter. It is force which is the essential attribute of matter.

He thus affirms that there are an infinite number of substances, each is single and unextended. This affirms his conviction that a true indivisible unit must be unextended, as nothing substantial or primary principle is made up of parts. Every primary principle must be a simple, indivisible reality. While according to Descartes the existence of bodies presupposes extension, Leibniz held that extension presupposes the existence of bodies or forces. Here we may need to understand what he means by a force.

The Concept of Force and Monadology

Leibniz holds that force is the source or foundation of the mechanical world as it is the ground of extension of the body. The idea of extension presupposes that in the body there is an aspect that extends itself. It is the nature of the body to spread itself out, and to continue itself. Force is the property owing to which that body appears as limited, or as matter.

Leibniz maintains that every unit of force is an indivisible union of soul and matter. It is a union of activity and passivity. It is an organizing, self-determining, purposive force, which limits itself and which possesses the power of resistance. Leibniz further affirms a pluralism, as there is a plurality of forces. There is an infinite number of forces or particular individual substances, each being a dynamic unit independent of others. Each unit is immaterial, unextended and simple. With regard to the nature of these units, Leibniz holds a very peculiar view. Each of them is an independent substance and is a union of matter and soul. In this sense Leibniz's pluralism of substances which resemble atomism distinguishes itself from the latter. Each substance, according to him, is a metaphysical point and not a physical or mathematical unit. The human body is nothing but a plurality of such simple forces and the human soul is also such a metaphysical point. This is Leibniz's solution to the mind-body problem.

Each monad, according to him, is a union of matter and soul, but is predominantly a spiritual or psychic force. What is true for one monad is true for all, as the same principle that expresses itself in the mind of man is active in body, plant, and animal. He thus asserts that all matter is animate. Leibniz's monadology opposes the traditional notion that equates mind with consciousness and holds that matter is essentially unconscious and is separated from the former. He thus goes against the fundamental Cartesian assumption which affirms thinking as

an exclusive attribute of mind. The mind according to him consists of perceptions and tendencies.

Leibniz maintains that each monad perceives the universe from its peculiar perspective and every monad has the power of perception or representation. There are clear and obscure perceptions as clearness and distinctness in different monads. Every monad perceives or represents and expresses the entire universe. In this sense each one of them is a world in miniature, a microcosm and a living mirror of the entire universe. Hence every monad feels everything that occurs in the entire universe. Each reflects and represents the entire universe from its unique perspective in its own way and this feature is the basis of the difference between them. The difference is in terms of degrees of clearness. Since the perspective of each monad is limited and no two monads mirror the universe in the same manner, they form a hierarchy.

Those monads which represent the universe with more and more clarity are on the top of the hierarchy. They are arranged from the lowest to the highest monad in terms of the clearness of consciousness. This is visible in nature where there is a hierarchy from plants, to animals to man; a hierarchy of monads. Leibniz asserts that nature makes no lapses and there is a continuous line of differences in clarity from the dullest piece of ignorant matter to God, which is the highest monad. God, according to Leibniz, is the highest monad, which is perfect and is pure activity.

Another important feature of the monads is that each of them is windowless. Each is windowless and a homogenous unit. Hence a monad is not determined from without and everything it is to be is potential or implicit in it. This is the principle of continuity. Nothing can enter inside it from without and nothing can be in the monad which has not always been there. Nothing can ever come into it that is not in it now. This windowlessness makes each monad an independent and autonomous unit, unconnected and uninfluenced by others.

According to Leibniz, the entire universe is constituted of an infinite number of such monads, or individual existences, which are spiritual entities. They resemble the atoms of Democritus, as the latter are also infinite in number and homogenous. But the monads are different, as unlike the atoms, they are not material, but metaphysical. They are eternal like Plato's ideas, but are not outside of things as Plato proposed and are in things as proposed by Aristotle.

Leibniz further contends that, monads are in a process of evolution and in this process each monad realizes its nature. This process is controlled with an inner necessity and not externally, as they are independent and windowless. Each monad passes through a series of stages of evolution and each stage consists in an unfolding of what is implicit in it. Since monad is windowless, nothing in the monad is lost in this process of evolution and nothing new is gained as well. Everything that was there was preserved in the later stages and future stages are predetermined in the earlier ones. This is called the doctrine of preformation or the incasement theory. Leibniz thus says that every monad is charged with the past and is big with the future.

The entire universe is constitutive of these monads, including the organic and inorganic bodies. Leibniz maintains that in organisms there is a central monad or a Queen Monad, which is a soul. The central monad represents the picture of the entire body and it is the guiding principle of the monads surrounding it. On the other hand, the inorganic bodies are not centralized with a queen monad and they consist of a mere mass or aggregation of monads. There is no union of monads in inorganic bodies.

The mind—body problem is addressed by Leibniz in this context. He rules out interactionism as monads are windowless and are not acted upon from without. Nor can there be any causal interaction; as such possibility will violate the principle of autonomy of monads. He thus suggests that the harmony between mind and body is by God. This notion of pre-established harmony is employed in order to explain the relationship between the mental and the physical realms. God arranged the minds and bodies from the very beginning in such a way that they shall go together. The soul and body are in a relation of harmony, which is pre-established by God.

This harmony ensures a parallelism or concomitance between the mental and physical states. The body is the material expression of the soul, as corresponding to force in matter there is conscious activity, or will. The souls act according to the laws of final causes, by means of desire, ends, and means, which are psychic and the bodies act according to the laws of efficient causes or motions, which are mechanical.

Leibniz's picture of the universe thus exhibits an organic unity. As in an organism each part has its function, each monad functions in the universe to form the reality. Each has its specific function to perform and all monads act together like the parts of an organism. Every

state in a monad is the effect of the preceding state in it and each state acts in unison with the states of all the other monads due to pre-established harmony. This would also explain the reason why and how the universe exhibits an order. The universe exhibits an order and uniformity, as everything in nature can be mechanically explained. There is a causal order between things in the world and the universe functions like a causal chain, where everything is causally related. But this idea of causality too is peculiar. Monadology rejects the idea of external cause as there cannot be any cause from without, thanks to the windowlessness of monads. Hence, causation means concomitant changes. It only means a harmonious action of the parts, which is due to pre-established harmony established by God. The order exhibited in the Universe owes to this pre-established harmony instituted by god. God has arranged monads in such a way that they work without any external interference, neither from other monads nor even from God. The order and design in the universe presupposes a higher reason and God is the ultimate cause of all occurrences. Hence the source of mechanics lies in metaphysics. The metaphor of multiple clocks showing the same time is cited here. Since all the clocks keep time with each other without any causal interaction, there must have been a single outside Cause that regulated all of them.

With this idea of pre-established harmony, Leibniz reconciles Mechanism and Teleology and materializes a harmony of religion and reason. It is also a harmony between the physical kingdom of nature and the moral kingdom of grace. He maintains that the universal principles of physics and mechanics presuppose a divine purpose. They are not like laws of logic or mathematics as their existence depends on utility. He affirms that their ground is the wisdom of God. God has chosen them as ways of realizing his purpose.

The souls, according to him, are the copies of God and hence are little divinities in their own departments. Man's reason is like God's reason in kind, though differing from it in degree. Man's purpose agrees with God's. There is a harmony between man's reason and God's reason, between man's purpose and God's purpose, Between physical kingdom and the kingdom of grace, between God the builder of the machine of the universe and God the monarch of the divine spiritual state.

God is the highest monad, the monad of monads. Leibniz holds that the principle of continuity demands a highest monad at the end of the series of forces. He is the cause of the monads. The order and harmony of nature call for a harmonizer and the eternal and necessary truths like the truths of logic and geometry presuppose an eternal intellect in which to exist.

He further states that, while being an individual monad or a person, God also transcends all monads. He is the supernatural and superrational monad. God is the most perfect and most real being and hence He undergoes no changes or evolution. He possesses perfect knowledge as he sees all things at a glance and He is the ultimate Harmonizer. Returning to the clock metaphor, since all the clocks keep time with each other without any causal interaction, there must be a single outside Cause that regulated all of them who is God. Hence the concept of God is a central concept in Leibniz's philosophy.

Quiz

1. What is a substance according to Leibniz?
(a) a homogenous entity (b) An expression of force (c) both extended and thinking entity (d) essentially unextended.
2. What according to Leibniz is a unit of force?
(a) A pure soul (b) A material atom (c) An indivisible union of soul and matter (d) Neither soul nor matter.
3. Which of the following does not describe a force?
(a) Immaterial (b) Unextended (c) Independent of others (d) Complex aggregate.
4. Which of the following is not true of monads?
(a) All monads represent the universe in the same manner (b) Monads form a hierarchy (c) Every monad perceives or represents and expresses the entire universe (d) Each monad is windowless.
5. What was Leibniz's solution to the mind-body dualism?
(a) Interactionism (b) Psycho-physical parallelism (c) Occasionalism (d) Pre-established harmony.

Answer Key

1. (b)
2. (c)
3. (d)
4. (a)
5. (d)

Assignments

1. Explain Leibniz's monadology.
2. Discuss the concept of pre-established harmony.
3. Explain the role of God in Leibniz's system of philosophy.

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Chapter 14

Fundamentals of John Locke's Empiricism

Key Words: empiricism, knowledge, substance, "I know, not what", innate ideas, ideas, simple idea, complex idea, material substance.

The empiricist school of philosophy had exerted phenomenal influence in the development of modern philosophy in Europe, with the British philosopher John Locke being its first major proponent. The epistemological turn in modern philosophy acquired a new dimension with the publication of Locke's *The Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where he explicates the foundational doctrines of the empiricist school of philosophy. Apart from his contributions in epistemology, Locke was also a chief proponent of what is known as the social contract theory in political philosophy. Here his writings are still considered as very important in the development of liberalism.

John Locke's philosophy expresses dissatisfaction over the fundamental theoretical positions held by the Scholastic thinkers. Initially he was influenced by Descartes, but later criticized him and developed the foundations of empiricism, which became a very important and influential philosophical system during the modern age. This chapter will deal with his contributions in the area of epistemology which he began with a criticism of the foundations of rationalism. It will discuss Locke's refutation of innate ideas which the rationalists consider as important and then tries to elaborate his theory of knowledge and its various components like the notions of ideas, qualities and substances.

Locke begins with an enquiry of how knowledge is obtained and tries to establish the importance of experience in the process of knowledge acquisition. He asks, with what objects are our understandings fitted to deal and with what objects are they not fitted to deal. Locke's influential work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is, according to the author, "An inquiry into the understanding, pleasant and useful. Since it is the understanding that sets man above the rest of sensible beings, and gives him all the advantage and dominion, which he has over them." He thus ventures enquiring into the original, certainty, and extent of human

knowledge, together with the grounds and degrees of belief, opinion, and assent. The *Essay* deals with both the psychological question concerning the origin of our ideas and the epistemological questions concerning the certainty, grounds etc., of our knowledge.

The Refutation of Innate Ideas

Innate ideas are those ideas, which are native to the mind and such a notion constitutes the foundation of rationalistic tradition. Locke seeks to refute this for establishing his empiricist conception of knowledge. The concept of innate ideas stands for the innate principles or primary notions present in our understanding from the very beginning. The soul receives them in its very first being and brings into the world with it. One example for such an idea would be the speculative innate idea which affirms that “whatsoever is, is and it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be” this is a classical example for an innate idea, which human beings do not derive from experience, but something which we already know.

Locke examines the arguments that were advanced by the rationalists to support the notion of innate ideas. The most prominent one is the conviction that all men agree about the validity of certain speculative and practical principles. This is the theory of universal consent. Accordingly, it has been argued that these ideas are originally imprinted on men's minds and we have brought them into the world with us as necessarily and really as we do with any of our inherent faculties.

Locke advances a series of objections against this. He says that even if it were true that all men agree about certain principles this would not prove that these principles are innate. He argues that the origin of all our ideas can be explained without postulating innate ideas and hence the hypothesis of innate ideas is superfluous. Here we should apply the principle of economy and do away with such a postulation.

To clarify his points, Locke examines the speculative innate idea, “whatsoever is, is”. It is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be. This is the most universally accepted candidate for an innate idea, as no one can doubt its claim. But Locke is not prepared to allow such propositions having an universal assent and he points out that they are not known to many human beings in the

world. For instance, children and idiots have minds but do not have assent to these truths. Locke points out that, it is a contradiction to say, that there are truths imprinted on the soul, yet it does not perceive or understand them. Locke wonders how can they be innate, if they are not notions naturally imprinted and how can they be unknown if they are notions imprinted? Therefore, concludes Locke, there are no such ideas.

Locke then considers an objection to his argument. It is possible that all men know and assent to them when they come to the use of reason. The use and exercise of reason helps man discover these principles. Responding to these objections Locke argues that reason itself is nothing else but the faculty of deducing unknown truths from principles or propositions that are already known. If then, how can reason discover innate principles? He then affirms that the notion of innateness is a contradiction. He contends that, if men have innate truths originally, they must have it before the use of reason. But as his opponents would argue, they are always ignorant of them till they use reason. This, according to Locke, is to say that men know and know them not at the same time, which is a contradiction.

He then points out that children do not know them, but they use reason. Illiterate people and savages are not aware of many such innate truths, though they are also rational. Therefore, men use reason before they get the knowledge of those general truths. The general abstract ideas are framed in the mind only after men come to the use of reason. They are framed in the same ways other ideas are framed. Locke thus contends that the mind comes to be furnished with ideas from experience. The mind gets all the materials of reason and knowledge from experience. Therefore, all our knowledge is founded on experience and is derived from two basic sources: sensation and reflection. In sensation, the senses convey into the mind several distinct perceptions of things and in reflection we perceive the operations of our own minds. In sensation things of external world affect the senses and we get ideas about them. In reflection we get ideas about the operations of our own minds like perceiving, thinking, doubting, believing and willing.

An idea, according to Locke, is the object of thinking, which we get from sensations and reflection. None of our ideas are innate as our mind has none

before experience writes on it. An idea is defined as whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding. Locke argues that ideas are coeval with sensation, as the soul begins to have ideas when it begins to perceive. Locke says in the *Essay* that to ask, at what time a man has first any ideas, is to ask, when he begins to perceive. Having ideas, and perception are one and the same thing. He affirms that a man begins to have ideas when he first has sensation.

Locke further says that the ideas are divided into simple and complex. The mind receives the simple ideas passively from external sources and it produces the complex ideas by combining the simple ideas. Here the sources of simple ideas are referred to. Among simple ideas of sensation we have ideas received from one sense organ like the coldness and hardness of a piece of ice, the scent and whiteness of a lily, the taste of sugar etc. We also have ideas furnished by more than one senses as in the case of pace or extension, figure, rest, and motion etc. Similarly there are simple ideas of reflection, and of sensation and reflection. The former include ideas of perception or thinking, and volition or willing and the latter include ideas like pleasure or delight, and its opposite, pain or uneasiness, power, existence, unity etc. Hence there are four classes of simple idea; of one sense, of more than one senses, of reflection, of sensation and reflection.

After explaining in detail the different types of simple ideas, Locke takes up the notion of complex ideas, which are actively framed by the mind, using simple ideas as materials. The mind combines two or more simple ideas into one complex idea. It may also combine the data of sensation and reflection to form new complex ideas. For example, the ideas of beauty, gratitude, a man, an army, the universe etc., the mind combines simple ideas of whiteness, sweetness and hardness to form the complex idea of a lump of sugar.

There are complex ideas of substances, of modes and of relations. The idea of a man or of a rose or of gold are examples for the complex idea of substances and the idea of an army is an example for a collective substance. The idea of a figure or of thinking or running are examples for complex ideas of modes or modifications and when we see the relationship between two ideas like fire and warmth, then the complex idea of relation is formed.

Locke says that the complex ideas are produced by the mind through certain activities like combining, comparing and separating. We combine several simple ideas into one complex idea or compare two ideas, whether simple or complex, without uniting them into one in order to obtain ideas of relations and we separate certain ideas from all other ideas that accompany them in their real existence to obtain abstract general ideas.

Idea of Substance

The notion of substance has been at the center of philosophical contemplations since the time of Aristotle, or even before that. The rationalist thinkers have dealt with this problem elaborately and their respective philosophical positions—dualism of Descartes, pantheism of Spinoza and pluralism of Leibniz—were the result of their responses to this problem. Locke, for whom sensations and reflections are the only two fundamental sources of knowledge acquisition find it difficult to accommodate substance into his ontology. But at the same time, he contended that the qualities we perceive couldn't hang in air and need a substratum in which they subsist. Hence he describes the material substance as “I know, not what”. The substances are not perceived by the mind, but we know that they exist for sure.

Now if we do not perceive the substance, then how do we know about them? Locke says that we infer substance as the support of 'accidents', qualities or modes. We cannot conceive the substances as subsisting by themselves. Substance is treated as an unknown substratum, which supports accidents. Locke talks about material and spiritual substances. The example for the former includes any object we come across in the material world. For example, a rose. We have a number of simple ideas of red or white, of a certain odour, a certain figure or shape, and so on which go together in experience, and we call the combination of them by one name, 'rose'. But what is the substance or substratum apart from the qualities or ideas is not known. Hence it is described as “I know, not what”. Spiritual substance or mind is again inferred by us by combining simple ideas of thinking, doubting and so on, with the vague and obscure notion of a substratum in which these psychical operations inhere.

About the ideas of modes, Locke says that they are complex ideas, which contain not in them the supposition of subsisting by themselves, but are

considered as dependencies on or affections of substances. The examples cited include the ideas signified by the words triangle, gratitude, murder, etc. According to Locke there are simple and mixed modes. Simple modes stand for the variations or different combinations of the same simple idea, without the mixture of any other ideas and mixed modes are compounded of simple ideas of several kinds, put together to make one complex one.

Ideas of relations are obtained by comparing an idea—simple or complex—with another idea. The idea of causality is an example. Again, we observe the simple idea of fluidity is produced in wax by the application of a certain degree of heat and infer that the simple idea of heat is the cause of fluidity in wax, which is the effect.

Locke's Empiricism: A Brief Assessment

Locke is an important philosopher both because he is the founder of the empiricist tradition in philosophy and because of his influential works in the fields of political philosophy. With his criticism of innate ideas, Locke challenges a long-established tradition of thought that goes back to the days of Plato. He has exposed some fundamental weaknesses of the rationalist tradition, which emphasizes on knowledge that is gained by the mind a priori. With his stress on sensations and reflections, Locke initiates a new beginning in philosophy that makes empirical observation and experience at the center stage. He proposes the ideation theory of knowledge and a representationalist epistemology, which exerted significant influence in the formation of ideas in the history of modern thought. But, Locke encounters difficulties with regard to his theories of substance and qualities. We shall examine his doctrine of qualities in the next chapter.

Quiz

1. Which is not true of innate ideas?
(a) Native to the mind (b) Held by the rationalists (c) Gained from experience (d) The soul receives them in its very first being
2. What are ideas according to Locke?
(a) Innate to the mind (d) Mind has them from the beginning (c) Coeval with sensation (d) Copies of impressions.
3. The ideas of modes are:

- (a) Combination of simple and complex ideas (b) Simple ideas (c) Complex ideas (d) Both simple and complex ideas.
4. The ideas of beauty and gratitude are examples for:
(a) Simple idea (b) Combination of simple ideas of sensations
(c) Combination of simple ideas of reflection. (d) Combination of ideas of sensation and reflection

Answer Key:

1. (c)
2. (c)
3. (a)
4. (d)

Assignments

1. Discuss Locke's refutation of innate ideas.
2. Describe the different types of ideas.

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Chapter 15

John Locke: Theory of knowledge

Key Words:

Ideas, self-evident knowledge, quality, primary qualities, secondary qualities, modes, representationalism.

In the previous chapter we have outlined some fundamental doctrines of Locke's empiricism. We have examined his concepts of simple and complex ideas which are the archetypes of knowledge according to empiricist epistemology. The ideas of substances, modes and relations are the three types of complex ideas our mind forms by combining the simple ideas received from multiple sources. Before we proceed further, we need to understand how knowledge is gained from ideas. We learn that the notion of idea plays a crucial role in the empiricist epistemology, as Locke proposes an ideation theory in order to explain the concept of knowledge.

Locke says that knowledge is the perception of the connection or agreement, and repugnancy or disagreement, of any of our ideas. Since the mind has access only to the ideas and not to the world of objects, we have certainty about the ideas alone. Locke affirms that, we have no self-evident knowledge of real existence except of oneself and God, as while the existence of oneself is intuitive the existence of God is known by reason.

Knowledge according to Locke, agrees with the realities of things, as the simple ideas we get represent things outside. In this sense the simple ideas are the product of things operating on our minds. In other words, things outside us arose in us sensations that generate simple ideas. We are passive in their reception. This is a very fundamental assumption of Locke's empiricism. He thus takes for granted the existence of things in the world, which had later attracted criticism from his own successors in the empiricist school. Locke thus assumes that there are things out there in the world and our simple ideas are copies of what is there in the world. Unlike these simple ideas, the complex ideas are not copies and they do not refer to anything original out there. The human mind makes them. Out of all the complex ideas formed by the mind the idea of substance is the most interesting and controversial one.

Before we discuss this notion we may have to examine how ideas are formed. The notion of quality is important here. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, Locke defines an idea as “whatsoever the mind perceives in itself or is the immediate object of perception, thought or understanding”. Now, these ideas themselves are produced by sources outside the mind. They are produced by objects in the world. In other words, objects have certain powers to produce ideas in the mind. These powers an object to produce an idea in the mind is called qualities.

Locke argues that, every object will have two types of qualities; primary qualities and secondary qualities. Primary qualities are inseparable from a body and they remain in it even when it undergoes changes. For example, qualities of solidity, extension, figure and mobility, motion or rest, and number. Locke considers them as the original or primary qualities of the body, which produce simple ideas in us. They resemble what is in the object and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves. For example, The idea of figure resembles the object itself which causes the idea in us. In this sense, they are real qualities, as they really exist in the bodies, whether anyone perceives them or not.

On the other hand, secondary qualities are not in the objects themselves. They are powers to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities. For example, colours, sounds, tastes and odours. They have no resemblance of them in the body in which they are perceived. For example, in the case of a red rose, our idea of it does not resemble the rose considered in itself. What corresponds in the rose to our idea of red is its power of producing in us the idea of red through the action of imperceptible particles on our eyes.

But Locke is not prepared to consider these secondary qualities as purely subjective. He argues that they are powers really in the objects that can produce simple ideas in us. But, at the same time, these ideas like colours, sounds etc., are not copies of colours and sounds in the objects themselves.

This division of primary and secondary qualities has created a lot of difficulties to Locke's doctrine. As we have seen above, Locke's representative theory of perception does not ascertain the existence of anything else other than our ideas. He then holds that, while the ideas of primary qualities really resemble things the ideas of secondary qualities do not. But since what we know immediately are ideas alone, we have no way to know

whether these ideas do or do not resemble things. Yet Locke asserts that they are more original and resemble things. Again, as Locke himself contends, we are not certain whether things other than our ideas even exist. We cannot compare ideas with things to see whether they resemble them or not. Hence the representationalism of Locke fails to establish the distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

Again, with regard to the ideas and substance, Locke's views attracted criticisms. Locke says that we are sure of ideas or collections or clusters of qualities. Since ideas cannot subsist by themselves, there must be some substratum where they subsist, which is the substance. Here the idea of substance is conceived as the support of such qualities, which are capable of producing simple ideas in us. It is the support in which the primary qualities inhere. For example, we put together some qualities like white, sweet, solid etc., in our idea of substance of sugar. In this sense several simple ideas coexist in a substance, which is their unknown bearer or substratum. It remains unknown, because we do not experience the dependence of these qualities on one another.

As mentioned above, the origin of our idea of substance is in the notion of the unknown support of those qualities we find existing. We assume that these qualities cannot subsist without something to support them and this support is the substance. We infer its existence as the support of accidents, qualities or modes. Hence the complex idea of substance is the collection of simple ideas, with a supposition of something to which they belong, and in which they subsist. Of course, we have no clear distinct idea about what exactly it is.

We form the complex idea of substance by initially making a distinction between complex ideas of particular substances and the general idea of substance. The complex ideas of particular substances are obtained by combining simple ideas and the general idea of substance is obtained by abstraction. In his notion of the general idea of substance the influence of Scholasticism is visible, though Locke's own view is substantially different from the Scholastic view. The idea is about an unchanging substratum hidden beneath the changing phenomena. In this sense it refers to the power of the reflective mind. With regard to the spiritual substance Locke says that it is a substance that thinks and hence it is an immaterial substance. This idea is arrived at by combining the simple ideas of thinking, knowing, willing, understanding, doubting etc., which are obtained by reflection, with the vague and obscure notion of a substratum in which these psychical

operations inhere. Unlike Descartes and other rationalists he maintains that thinking is not the essence of spiritual substance, but its action. On the other hand, the idea of physical or material substance is obtained by putting together corporeal qualities and supposing a support for them.

The idea of God is another such complex idea. Though we are certain about its existence, it is not an innate idea, but we know about him with the employment of reason, which is our natural ability. God or Pure Spirit is an ever-active substance according to Locke. We form this idea by taking the ideas of existence, duration, knowledge and power, pleasure and happiness and enlarging them to an infinite degree. We then combine these infinite ideas in order to arrive at the idea of God. Locke states that God alone is ever active. Matter is essentially passive and mind is both active and passive, as it becomes active when it moves the bodies and becomes passive when it receives ideas produced by bodies outside us. According to Locke, the mind is more easily conceived than the body.

Lock also conceives a mind-body interaction and states that ideas are formed through such interactions. The action of the body on the mind in producing sensations is a fundamental act in the process of knowledge acquisition. The doctrine of qualities and the distinction between primary and secondary qualities become relevant in this context. Primary qualities of the body are capable of producing the ideas of solidity, extension and motion in the mind and these ideas are understood as the copies of real qualities in the body. On the other hand, secondary qualities of colour, sound, taste etc., do not really belong to the body, but are merely the effects produced on the mind by solid extended objects.

Locke's empiricism, as we could see, is historically very important, as it provides an important perspective in modern philosophy and epistemology. It is very close to the contentions of common sense and position adopted by modern science. Modern age demanded a coming together of two approaches to knowledge; the mathematical conception of knowledge which relied on a priori structures of human understanding and the kind of knowledge that emphasizes experience and observation. Locke's contributions to the latter are phenomenal.

Quiz

1. The origin of our idea of substance is in the notion of.....
(a) Unknown support of qualities (b) Secondary qualities (c) Spiritual substance
(d) God.
2. Which of the following descriptions does not match the nature of the spiritual substance according to Locke?
(a) A substance that thinks (b) An immaterial substance (c) substratum in which these psychical operations inhere (d) A substance whose essence is thinking.
3. The idea of God is?
(a) A simple idea (b) A complex idea (c) An innate idea (d) An idea of reflection.
4. Which among the following is not true for Locke?
(i) God alone is ever active
(ii) Matter is essentially passive
(iii) Mind is only active.
(iv) Mind is more easily conceived than the body.
(a) [iii] alone (b) [iii] and [iv] (c) [ii] and [iv] (d) [ii] alone.

Answer Keys

1. [a]
2. [d]
3. [b]
4. [a]

Assignments

1. Discuss the distinction between primary and secondary qualities.
2. What is an idea and how many types of ideas are there?

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Chapter 16

George Berkeley's Immaterialism and Subjective Idealism

Key Words

Immaterialism , *esse est percipi*, material substance, sense data, skepticism, primary quality, secondary quality, substratum theory.

Introduction

Bishop George Berkeley (12 March 1685 – 14 January 1753) is the second among the great British Empiricist thinkers, after John Locke. Though he agrees with Locke on many aspects concerning the nature of philosophy, Berkeley's contributions are more noted for his opposition as well as refutation of the former's fundamental assumptions and doctrines. For instance, one major issue with which Berkeley preoccupied himself was the refutation of material substance, a theory that occupied a central place in Locke's philosophical framework.

Berkeley had reasons for opposing Locke, particularly the notion of material substance, as he was an Anglican Bishop—the Bishop of Cloyne, a small Irish town—and the idea of an independent or autonomous material substance counters some basic assumptions of the Christian Church. Berkeley thus denied the existence of material substance and his major works initiate arguments in favour of this philosophical position. In his *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* he advocated that nothing exists outside the mind and in another work titled, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, he propounded that the world depends for its existence on being perceived; *esse est percipi*.

As a Bishop, he wants to refute materialism and atheism and he thought that this could be attained by showing that the notion of a mind-independent material substance is untenable. With this refutation, Berkeley intends to establish the spiritual basis of all reality and assert that all things owe their existence to a perceiving mind. Methodologically, this way of argument is of course an extension of the empiricist epistemology initiated by Locke. But while

Locke derived a form of representationalism from the basic principles of empiricism, Berkeley follows those basic principles in their extreme form and seeks to demonstrate that they ultimately suggest a psychic basis for all reality. Argument against the material substance is set forth in *The Dialogues of Hylas and Philonous*, a work written in the form of a dialogue between two characters; Hylas, who stands for scientifically educated common sense and Philonous, is Berkeley himself. The Greek word Hylas means “wood”, which implies “matter” and the word Philonous is a combination of “philo” which means “love” and “nous” which means, “mind”. Philonous is thus a lover of the mind, who asserts that every reality is mental.

Berkeley's Important Themes

From the outset, Berkeley intends to advocate a form of immaterialism, which affirms that material substance does not exist. Bertrand Russell observes that, “Berkeley is important in philosophy through his denial of the existence of matter—a denial which he supported by a number of ingenious arguments.

In order to substantiate his major point, Berkeley examines all those aspects of the philosophical doctrine that supports the existence of a material substance. Most of his arguments were raised against Locke's doctrine of material substratum. He thus contends that another objectionable thesis that supports the idea of material substance is the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, which Locke considered as central to his representationalist epistemology. Berkeley argues that this distinction is superfluous and further asserts that objects owe to their existence minds which perceive them. This theory is known as subjective idealism.

He then argues against Locke's notion of abstract ideas, which asserts that human mind has the ability to frame abstract ideas. This doctrine would eventually suggest that external objects have a natural or real existence, distinct from being perceived. Before we examine these refutations, we shall have a brief look at the notion of material substance, which Berkeley finds objectionable.

The Idea of Material Substance

The notion of material substance has a long history in western philosophy. In the ancient Greek philosophy, the naturalists were eager to affirm its existence,

as they were largely trying to explain the reality underlying the corporeal world. In Plato's metaphysics, matter was treated as unreal but his disciple Aristotle reinstated its importance and understood it as a substance on which the qualities of material objects depend on. Matter is therefore, a substance which has those qualities. It figures as one of the four causes that operate behind the workings of the universe and it remains the same, irrespective of the changes the object undergoes as a result of forms shaping them differently.

During the modern age, Descartes' dualism of the mind and the body conceives matter as constituting an independent domain (from the domain of the mind). With this dualism Descartes could explain the workings of the material universe independent of any metaphysical or spiritual principles; an outlook that was very important during the modern period. But as mentioned above, it was Locke's notion of material substratum that Berkeley found more objectionable and he ventures to refute it with several arguments.

According to Locke, the material substratum is an unknown support of the sensible qualities objects have. It is thus an entity independent of mind or consciousness. Following the dictates of his representationalist empiricism, Locke argued that the qualities we perceive in the objects of the external world cannot hang in air and are in need of a support. He thus maintained that there must be a substratum or support to which these qualities are attached.

Responding to these theories Berkeley wonders whether we can represent to ourselves what we mean by matter in this sense. He asks whether this material substratum is not just a word, which we use without any understanding behind it. He is curious to know whether we can describe what we mean by the existence of objects in abstraction from the fact that they are being perceived. Berkeley invites us to see matter as nothing but the very things we see, feel and hear; as only the collections of ideas which make up the experience of perception. This is Berkeley's immaterialism, which he expounds in his work, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, in which Philonous represents Berkeley's views, which include immaterialism, refutation of material substance, subjective idealism etc. Hylas represents an opposite of these views, which ultimately argue for the reality of material substance.

As mentioned above, his name indicates that Philonous is a lover of mind, who argues that all reality is mental. The word Hylas in ancient Greek means wood and implies matter and hence it stands for the view that material substances exist. The argument of immaterialism can be summarized in the following conversation between Hylas and Philonous.

Hylas: Can anything be more fantastical, more repugnant to common sense, or a more manifest piece of Scepticism, than to believe there is no such thing as *matter*?

Philonous: I do not deny the reality of sensible things, i.e., of what is perceived immediately by the senses. But there is no ground to believe that we do not see the causes of colours or hear the causes of sounds..... by sight we perceive only light, colour, and figure; by hearing, only sounds..... apart from sensible qualities there is nothing sensible, and sensible things are nothing but sensible qualities or combinations of sensible qualities.

Berkeley seems to argue in the following manner. Sense data are mental and heat and cold are sensations. Great heat is a pain, and pain must be in a mind. Therefore heat is mental. A sweet taste is a pleasure and a bitter taste is a pain, and pleasure and pain are mental. Odours are also pleasant or unpleasant and hence are mental. This points to the fact that all reality is immaterial, i.e., mental or spiritual. Berkeley advances an argument about Lukewarm Water to make this point clearer. He says that when one of our hands is hot and the other cold, if we put both into lukewarm water, it may feel cold to one hand and hot to the other, though water cannot be at once hot and cold. Therefore, all these sensations are mental.

The refutation of material substance follows from this argument. Berkeley argues that all our knowledge is derived from sensation and reflection. We know only ideas. And can never know a material world without us. It is a fact that, in our knowledge about material object we are limited to states of consciousness. We cannot compare our ideas with the bodies, as we do not know anything about them: and have no direct knowledge about them. We do not even know whether they exist or not.

Again, it has been pointed out that the idea of material substance inevitably leads to skepticism. John Locke, while talking about it had referred to the material substance as, "I know, not what". He says that, I know that such a substance should exist, as qualities cannot hang in air, but I do not know what it is, because I do not have ideas about it. For Berkeley, this leads to skepticism, as we cannot know it. Again, the idea of such a material substance, independent of the mind, may pose the threat of atheism and irreligion, as it posits an independent material substance and a world of pure space suggests the existence of an infinite, eternal immutable reality alongside of God. This will limit God and may even suggest His non-existence. Therefore, the belief in matter, leads to atheism and materialism. Hence in order to counter atheism, we have to demonstrate that material substance does not exist. He further states that the universe can be explained without material substance; with God, the supreme Spirit, and other spiritual beings.

Matter is described as an inert, senseless, unknown substance. This is why Locke had referred to it as "I know, not what". Matter neither acts, nor perceives, nor is perceived and it is mostly made up of negatives. The only positive supposition about matter is that it is a "support to qualities". Berkeley wonders how can anything be present to us, which is neither perceivable by sense nor reflection, nor capable of producing any idea in our minds, nor is at all extended, nor hath any form, nor exists in any place? He found that the basis of construing material substance is the theory of qualities and the distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

Accordingly, a corporeal body is a solid, extended, figured substance having the power of motion, possessing a certain color, weight, taste, smell, and sound. Some qualities like extension, figure, solidity, motion, rest etc., inhere in the substance and they are called primary qualities. On the other hand, qualities like color, sound, taste, smell etc. are nothing but the effects these primary qualities produce in a perceiving subject. They are not qualities of the body itself, but are in the perceiving subject. They are called secondary qualities.

This distinction between primary and secondary qualities therefore, assumes the existence of certain qualities in the object, which are independent of the perceiver. It is the distinction between what really and objectively exists

and what is merely subjective. This further implies that material things have certain properties independently of our perceiving them and therefore, they exist independently of us. The concept of primary qualities refers to the original qualities of the substance, which are in the body, and not just in the one who perceives them. They belong to the material object or the material substratum. On the other hand, the secondary qualities are in me.

A close examination reveals that, even the so called primary qualities are nothing but ideas in the mind. Lock recognizes this and affirms that they are in the object and also in the mind. According to him, they exist apart from the mind and are also in the mind. Berkeley argues that this is a contradiction. He thus maintains that the concept of matter thus involves a contradiction in it. He thus ventures to refute the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. He argues that the so-called primary qualities are not different in kind from the so-called secondary qualities. The ideas of extension and solidity, which are stated to be primary qualities and hence are understood as the original qualities that belong to the material substance are also gained through the sense of touch and hence are sensations in the mind. We cannot separate my idea of extension from the idea of colour and other so-called secondary qualities. When we perceive anything extended we perceive it as colored and having other secondary qualities also.

Berkeley thus concludes that the primary and secondary qualities are inseparably united. If secondary qualities exist only in the mind, the same thing must be true of primary qualities as well. As the lukewarm water argument affirms, the same water which appears cold to one hand seems warm to another. Therefore, secondary qualities of heat and cold are affections of the mind and are not patterns of real beings existing in the corporeal substances which excite them. An object which is sweet in one occasion may feel bitter on another occasion (for example, when we have fever) and to the same eye at different stations, or eyes of a different texture at the same station, figure and extension appear various. Hence they are not patterns or resemblances of qualities existing in matter.

If the existence of all objects depends on a mind's ability to perceive them, then is there anything called real existence of objects? Berkeley's response

is conditional. He says that they are real things in the sense that God arouses these sensations in us in a regular coherent order. Material substance is a mere combination of sensible qualities, such as extension, solidity, weight, and the like and not a support of accidents, or qualities without the mind. Nor are they ideal copies or resemblances of things that exist without the mind in an unthinking substance.

Berkeley argues that an idea can be like nothing but an idea and an idea can be compared only with another idea. This means that we cannot conceive a likeness except only between our ideas. For instance, a color or figure can be like nothing but another color or figure. According to Berkeley, every quality of an object can be reduced to a sensible quality or to a sensation, which is conscious and immaterial. Sensations are essentially psychic. Berkeley argues that there is nothing beyond sensations and hence every reality is mental.

Berkeley thus finally concludes that, there is no such thing as a material world. He maintains that, though sensible objects are real, they are not material. Instead, they are complex ideas or complex bundles of sensible qualities that exist only in the minds of the perceivers. In this sense, he holds that to exist is to be perceived: *esse est percipi*. Sensible objects exist only so long as they are being perceived by some mind. Hence things perceived are ideas which cannot exist without the mind. Therefore, the existence of things depends on them being perceived.

With the refutation of the distinction between the primary and secondary qualities and the notion of material substance, Berkeley challenges the substratum theory that holds that qualities of material objects depend on and exist in a substance, which has those qualities. This has been a widely held belief since Aristotle. It assumed the existence of a substance that remains the same through all the changes happening to the object. Berkeley categorically refutes this concept and asserts that one cannot form an idea of a material substratum that exists independent of a thinking mind. He thus takes the empiricist philosophical position forward with an attempt to refute materialism and atheism, but fails to extend his criticism of the idea of supporting substratum to refute the existence of the psychic substance. This is what his successor David Hume does. As Russell observes:

Berkeley advances valid arguments in favour of a certain important conclusion, though not quite in favour of the conclusion that he thinks he is proving. He thinks he is proving that all reality is mental; what he is proving is that we perceive qualities, not things, and that qualities are relative to the percipient. [*A History of Western Philosophy*]

Quiz

1. Berkeley's immaterialism does not attempt to prove.....
(a) The existence of a mind-independent material substance
(b) Establishing the spiritual basis of all reality (c) Asserting that all things owe their existence to a perceiving mind (d) To be is to be perceived
2. The theory that asserts that objects owe to their existence minds which perceive them is known as
[a] Immaterialism [b] Idealism [c] Subjectivism [d] Subjective idealism
3. Which of the following is not true for Berkeley?
[a] Sense data are mental [b] Pleasure and pain are mental [c] We certainly know that material bodies do not exist [d] The idea of material substance leads to skepticism.
4. According to Berkeley, the idea of material substance, independent of the mind may lead to
[a] Atheism [b] Irreligion [c] Skepticism [d] Subjective idealism.
5. Which of the following are held by Berkeley?
[i] Primary and secondary qualities are inseparably united.
[ii] Primary qualities exist apart from the mind and are also in the mind.
[iii] We cannot separate my idea of extension from the idea of colour and other so-called secondary qualities.
[iv] Qualities of material objects depend on and exist in a substance, which has those qualities.
[a] All the four [b] (i) and (iii) [c] (ii) and (iv) [d] (i), (ii) and (iii)

Answer Key

1. [a]
2. [d]
3. [c]
4. [d]
5. [b]

Assignments

1. Discuss Berkeley's immaterialism
2. How does Berkeley refute the distinction between primary and secondary qualities?

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Chapter 17

Berkeley: Refutation of Abstract Ideas and *Esse est Percipi*

Key Words:

Innate ideas, abstract ideas, ideas, material substance, subjective idealism, solipsism, Supreme will, God.

Berkeley's immaterialism has three components; the refutation of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, the refutation of material substance and the refutation of abstract ideas. We have examined the first two in the previous chapter. In this chapter we shall discuss his refutation of abstract ideas which argues that the mind can frame abstract ideas.

Berkeley maintains that the doctrine of abstract idea, which explains how general terms obtain meaning, is the source of all philosophical perplexity and illusion. According to him, this notion is the cause for holding the view that external objects have real existence distinct from being perceived. Hence its refutation is the next step in refuting the theory of material substratum. Berkeley argues that the theory of abstract ideas is one of Locke's most harmful mistakes, as it has become the ultimate source of skepticism in philosophy. Berkeley's work *Principles of Human Knowledge* ventures to refute, the belief that general terms signify abstract ideas.

Locke's Doctrine of Abstract Ideas

Locke's theory argues that a general term refers to an abstract general idea. For example, the general term 'man' contains all and only those properties that are common to all human beings. Hence the abstract general idea man refers to the ways in which all men resemble each other. According to Locke, ideas become general by separating from them all other ideas that determine them to any particular existence. All the circumstances of time, and place that make it a particular existence are separated. Such an abstracted idea can represent more individuals than one. While framing such ideas we omit all specific individual characteristics and only those common characteristics possessed by all members are retained. In this sense, abstracting is a process of leaving out various elements in an idea so that it applies to more than one individual or class.

Locke held that the mind is capable of abstracting and forming such abstract general ideas. It can separate one from all others that make it a particular. This abstracted idea stands for something real. The idea of material substratum is such an idea. When we apply this theory to frame the idea of a Human we assume that all human beings are colored but has no determinate color. It then includes a general idea of color, but not a specific color such as black or white or brown or yellow. It has a size but has no determinate size. Hence the mind will strip all particularizing qualities from an entity and create a new, intrinsically general, abstract idea.

Refutation of Abstract Ideas

It is agreed on all hands, that the qualities or modes of things do never really exist each of them apart by itself, and separated from all others, but are mixed, as it were, and blended together, several in the same object. But we are told, the mind being able to consider each quality singly, or abstracted from those other qualities with which it is united, does by that means frame to itself abstract ideas. ... Not that it is possible for colour or motion to exist without extension: but only that the mind can frame to itself by abstraction the idea of colour exclusive of extension, and of motion exclusive of both colour and extension. [*Principles of Human Knowledge*: (Intro, §7)]

Berkeley affirms that the idea of man that I frame to myself must be either of a white, or a black, or a tawny, a straight, or a crooked, a tall, or a low, or a middle-sized man. I cannot frame an image of man which both omits and includes all the particular characteristics of real individual men. Berkeley maintains that our experience is always of concrete particulars. When I contemplate the idea of man the image that comes to mind is that of some determinate shape, colour and other qualities. We cannot frame the idea of motion, distinct from the body moving, and which is neither swift nor slow, curvilinear nor rectilinear.

Again, since we use one name or sign for all particular ideas of the same sort, we come to believe there is one general or abstract idea corresponding to it. But Berkeley asserts that, in reality, it is just a name. Such supposed abstract ideas are not needful for the communication nor for the enlargement of our knowledge. He examines the abstract idea of material substance, which refers to the idea of a world without the mind and the idea of a real world of matter independent of the mind that perceives it. Here one has to separate all the sensible objects from their being perceived and thus conceive of matter as existing unperceived. But this is not possible. We cannot conceive any sensible thing or object, distinct from the sensation or perception of it.

Berkeley argues that, we can have general ideas, but not abstract general ideas. Every general idea, according to him, is a particular idea which is used to refer to a whole group. All ideas are images. We cannot form an image of an abstract general idea, where something is assumed to be possessing no specific qualities. According to Berkeley, whatever image we can form will be about a particular, which we can perceive. Our perceiving them is the basis of forming such an idea. This refutation leads to the refutation of the idea of a support for sensible qualities. Berkeley thus asserts that everything exists by virtue of being perceived by a mind and he declares the psychic nature of reality.

Berkeley and the External World

Though he refutes the notion material substance, Berkeley does not deny the existence of ordinary objects such as trees, apples and books, but only provides an immaterialist account of such objects. In other words, he contends that there is no material world, but there is a physical world of ordinary objects. He affirms that this physical world is mind-dependent, as it is composed of ideas, whose existence consists in being perceived. All the qualities of objects are dependent upon the senses. Therefore, objects do not exist independent of the mind.

Berkeley thus asserts the mind-dependency of ideas and argues that thoughts, passions, pictures of the imagination etc., do not exist without the mind. He claims that sensations too exist in the mind and their existence consists in being perceived or known by the mind. For example, the pen I use to write exists means I can see it and feel it. Hence, concludes Berkeley, *esse est percipi*, to be is to be perceived.

But if everything in my room exists because I perceive them or I see them and feel them, then what happens to them if I go out of this room and cease to perceive them? Berkeley says that, they still exist, because if I were in this room I might perceive them. He maintains that it is unintelligible to say that things exist when no mind perceives them. To exist is to be perceived by a mind and to be in the mind. The being of a thing can be equated with its being perceived by a mind.

Berkeley's theory thus seems to be taking for granted the existence of the mind, where the latter is understood as something which knows or perceives ideas. The mind is the entity that wills, imagines and remembers about ideas. It is an active substance which supports or

perceives ideas. But the mind itself cannot be an idea, as ideas are passive. Hence apart from the passive ideas we receive, there exists an active mind/soul/spirit. Its existence consists in perceiving ideas, and thinking.

The ideas are inert, fleeting, dependent beings and they do not subsist by themselves. They are supported by or exist in, minds or spiritual substances. The mind is active and is an indivisible substance and we cannot have an idea of it, as it is the thing which has ideas. This position of Berkeley leads to a form of subjective idealism and solipsism. If everything exists is an idea in the mind, then this leads to solipsism. It seems to be suggesting that if I cease to exist, the world too comes to an end and I and my ideas alone exist! The world is in my mind as my mind creates the world!

Berkeley envisages resolving such issues by introducing the concept of God. He hopes that this concept resolves the threat of solipsism. Things owe their existence to a mind and when all finite minds cease to exist, the world still exists in the eternal mind, which is the mind of God. He argues that, if I do not perceive them, then some other mind should perceive them. If there is no one to perceive them, then there is the eternal mind, or the mind of God, which perceives everything at once. The existence of God is also assured of by conceiving God as the incorporeal objective cause of the sensations or ideas in my mind. The sensations should have an external source, as I myself cannot be their creator. Since material substance does not exist, the cause must be a spiritual entity, which is God. Moreover, the objectivity, order, significance and necessity of our ideas suggest an active intelligent substance as their cause.

God is therefore, the supreme Will or Spirit that produces the sensations and ideas in my mind. Being the supreme intelligence, He determines the order our ideas shall follow when we have sensations. Ideas and sensations exhibit steadiness, order, and coherence which point to the wisdom and benevolence of its supreme intelligent author. In nature we find connection between events and hence a regularity and order—which we call the laws of nature—in terms of the connection between different ideas we have. We thus contend that the universe is well ordered. According to Berkeley, God establishes this, as He arouses in us different ideas in a certain order. For example, He has connected with the idea of food the idea of nourishment;

with the idea of sleep, the idea of refreshment; with the visual sensation of fire, the bodily sensation of warmth.

With this account, Berkeley gives a very different explanation of causation. According to him, a causal relationship means the perception of a certain necessary form of connection between our ideas. From this, we tend to believe that the ideas or things cause one another. A critic may wonder, whether when we have pain we say that we have an idea of pain. In this context Berkeley says that we should think with the learned and speak with the vulgar.

Berkeley's empiricism is often called as subjective idealism. But he is not a solipsist, for whom only my mind and its contents exist. He considers that the ideas the mind has objectively exist. They are imprinted on the senses by God Himself and hence they do really exist. But he is not prepared to accept that these ideas can exist independent of the mind. In other words, Berkeley would argue that the things perceived by sense are not generated from within by the mind itself, but imprinted by a Spirit, who is God. But they require the mind(s) in order to have any reality at all. They exist because a mind perceives them, To be is to be perceived.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is held by Berkeley?
(a) The abstract ideas are innate to the mind (b) We can have general ideas, but not abstract general ideas (c) The abstracted idea stands for something real (d) The idea of material substratum is an abstract idea.
2. Which is not held by Berkeley?
(a) Our experience is always of concrete particulars (b) Abstract ideas are not needful for the communication nor for the enlargement of our knowledge (c) Matter exists unperceived (d) We cannot conceive any sensible thing or object, distinct from the sensation or perception of it.
3. Why according to Berkeley, are we unable to form an image of an abstract general idea?
(a) Because in an abstract general idea something is assumed to be possessing no specific qualities (b) Because the mind knows everything from the beginning (c) Abstract ideas are analytical in nature. (d) Abstract general ideas are about universal entities
4. According to Berkeley, the mind is:

- (a) Something which knows or perceives ideas (b) An entity that wills, imagines and remembers about ideas. (c) Itself cannot be an idea (d) It is essentially a passive substance.
5. According to Berkeley, ideas are:
(i) Inert and fleeting (ii) Independently subsist by themselves (iii) Are mind-independent (iv) They are supported by or exist in, minds or spiritual substances.
(a) (i) and (ii) (b) (i) alone (c) (i) and (iv) (d) (D)

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [c]
3. [a]
4. [d]
5. [c]

Assignments

1. Discuss Berkeley's refutation of abstract ideas.
2. Explain the concept of God in Berkeley's philosophy.

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Chapter 18

David Hume: Theory of Knowledge

Key Words

Empiricism, skepticism, personal identity, necessary connection, causal connection, induction, impressions, ideas.

DAVID HUME (1711-76) is one of the most important among philosophers, because he developed to its logical conclusion the empirical philosophy of Locke and Berkeley, and by making it self-consistent made it incredible. He represents, in a certain sense, a dead end: in his direction, it is impossible to go further. [Russell; A History of Western Philosophy, p. 659]

One of the fundamental assumptions of empiricist school is the belief that knowledge is linked with the ideas the mind has. We have seen how Locke had developed his ideation theory of knowledge based on this assumption. He thought that there exists a world outside our mind from where we get ideas through sensations. Berkeley was critical about this position and has pointed out that we are certain only about our ideas and not about their external sources. He thus asserted the essential psychic nature of the world, as according to him, everything in the world depends upon their being perceived by a mind. He thus rejects the thesis that asserts the independent existence of the material world and has demonstrated how erroneous are Locke's conceptions of the material substance and his distinction between the primary and secondary qualities.

David Hume, the third among the great British empiricist philosophers, also began his philosophical contemplations with these fundamental empiricist insights. He accepts the empirical theory of the origin of knowledge proposed by Locke and also Berkeley's doctrine of *esse est percipi*. He deduces from these basic assumptions a radical form of empiricism that makes room for skepticism and even nihilism.

Hume contends that all sciences have a relation to human nature and hence it is important to study human nature with a science of man or moral philosophy. He affirms that only with this science we can provide solid foundation to other sciences. This science, like the Newtonian natural sciences, should employ the experimental method of reasoning and must be based on experience and observation. Hume argues that human nature is the capital or centre of the sciences and the science of

man should venture to understand it. It should enquire into the nature of the human understanding and analyze the powers and capacities of the human understanding. Most importantly, it enquires the origin and nature of knowledge.

As mentioned above, the science of man should follow the experimental method of the new sciences in order to study human nature. It should observe man's psychological processes and of his moral behavior and should try to find out their principles and causes. Like the natural sciences, this science should also start with the empirical data and employ the method of induction. It should collect data gained from introspection and observation of human life and conduct.

The Origin of Knowledge

Hume's project envisages examining the contents of the mind or perceptions, which are derived from experience. He decides to delve deep into the empiricist foundations of knowledge and argues that perceptions, which constitute the basis of experiential knowledge can be further divided into impressions and ideas. The impressions and ideas are the real building blocks of all our knowledge. Impressions include the sensations and feelings that are strong and vivid and they constitute either the impressions of sensation, which are derived from our senses, or the impressions of reflection derived from our experience of our mind. On the other hand, ideas are related to thinking and include concepts, beliefs, memories, mental images, etc. they are derived from and are copies of impressions and hence are relatively faint and unclear. Hume considers colours and smells as ideas of sensation and the idea of an emotion is treated as an idea of reflection.

The difference between impressions and ideas is a difference of forcefulness and vivacity. Unlike impressions, ideas are less forcible and less lively and they are unclear copies of impressions. For example, according to Hume, when we listen to music, we have impressions and when we remember the music we have listened, we have ideas. In other words, impressions are our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. We have impressions when we hear or see or feel or love or hate or desire or will. All our thoughts and ideas are the copies of these lively impressions.

The notion of impression is thus at the center of Hume's conception of knowledge. He argues that all knowledge is built up by compounding, transposing,

augmenting, or diminishing impressions and since ideas are copies of impressions, where there is no impression, there is no idea. For example, a blind man has no notion of colour.

The process can be explained in the following manner. The entire human system of knowledge begins with impressions. There are impressions of sensations, which arise from unknown sources and impressions of reflection, which are derived from the ideas which we have. The impression of any sensation like cold may be accompanied by a pain, the copy of which is retained by the mind as an idea. This may produce a new impression of aversion, which is an impression of reflection, which will in turn get copied by the memory and imagination and become ideas. The process goes on to make the human system of knowledge.

Hume now talks about a process called the association of ideas, whereby simple ideas are combined in order to produce complex ideas. This is the process that takes us from impressions to knowledge. Hume maintains that to each impression there is a corresponding idea and in the association of ideas these simple ideas are combined. In this sense he says that complex ideas are made up of the materials provided by the impressions. But the process of association consists not just in **combining** simple ideas. Rather, ideas are associated with one another in terms of the principles of **resemblance, contiguity in time and place, and cause and effect**. Therefore, in the formation of complex ideas, our ideas or thoughts exhibit a regularity, as they introduce one another not abruptly, but in an orderly fashion. For instance, a wound calls up the idea of pain suggesting a causal relationship. Hume thus argues that complex ideas are formed by the association of ideas according to the above mentioned principles.

The association of ideas thus functions as a uniting principle among ideas. It stands for some associating quality by which one idea naturally introduces another. It is described as a gentle force that introduces connections and order. It is an innate force or impulse in man that makes human beings combine together certain types of ideas.

When we further examine Hume's concept of knowledge, the idea of relations needs a deeper analysis. Hume says that all our reasoning deal with the relations between things and such relations are the objects of human reason or enquiry. Hume basically talks about two types of relations: the relations of ideas and matters of fact.

In the sciences of geometry, algebra and arithmetic we deal with relations of ideas. The truth the propositions that constitute these sciences are independent of questions about existence and what is the case in the world. They are thus absolutely certain as the relations they assert are necessary. In such sciences every affirmation made is either intuitively or demonstratively certain as the truth of these propositions depends on the relations between ideas or on the meanings of certain symbols. In other words, the truth of the propositions of these sciences depends on the meanings of the terms and they can neither be confirmed nor be refuted by experience. They are formal in nature. For example, Pythagorean Theorem says that on a triangle, the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides. Here its truth is not a matter of experience.

On the other hand, the relations of matters of fact are not known a priori and hence need to be known through sense experience. They are neither intuitively nor demonstratively certain and hence are not discoverable by thought alone. Propositions expressing matters of fact are therefore contingent. Their truth depends on what is the case. All those propositions that articulate causal relationship are examples for such judgements of matters of fact. For example, fire causes warmth. This judgement is based on the belief that there is a connection between cause and effect, i.e., fire and warmth. Hume challenges this supposition and asks from what impression or impressions the idea of causation is derived. He argues that the idea of causation is derived from some relation among objects and not from any inherent quality of those things which we call causes. No such common quality is discoverable in the so-called causes of things. Hence our own experience is the basis of the belief in causal relationship.

Hume considers three elements of the causal relationship; contiguity, temporal priority and necessary connection. Objects that are understood as cause and effect are immediately or mediately contiguous. On the basis of this we assume that they are causally connected. Again two things are causally connected when they appear one after the other and the one which appears first is understood as the cause and the one which follows is the effect. Cause must be temporally prior to the effect. Another important element in this relationship is the necessary connection between cause and effect. Hume says that contiguity or temporal priority do not establish necessary causal relation, as just because two events are contiguous or one

follows the other we cannot affirm that they are causally connected. Hence, the only factor that seems to support causality is necessary connection.

Here too Hume raises objection as he wonders from what impression or impressions is the idea of necessary connection derived. How do we justify that things that come into being have causes? On what basis do we necessarily connect a particular cause with a particular effect? Hume says that the contention that everything has a cause is neither intuitively certain nor is it demonstrable. What we see is that an object or event, which was nonexistent, suddenly comes into being. We notice that another thing or event precedes its appearance on all occasions of its appearance. We then conclude that there is some necessary connection between the antecedent and the consequent. Our belief in causation therefore, arises from experience and observation.

There are two important factors that affirm causal relationship. Firstly, if anything began to exist without a cause, it would cause itself, which is impossible and secondly, a thing, which came into being without a cause, would be caused by nothing and nothing cannot be the cause of anything. Hume criticizes these arguments saying that they beg the question. They presuppose the validity of the very principle they are supposed to demonstrate, namely, that anything which begins to exist must have a cause.

Hume thus affirms that causal relationship is not a matter of logical necessity. Nor is it the result of intuition. Hume wants us to focus only on the impressions and ideas we have and to assume the existence of anything beyond them is to venture into meaningless metaphysics. He establishes that there is no necessary connection between objects and no object implies the existence of any other object. Each idea is independent and is not connected with any other idea and we have access only to them.

As mentioned above, the basis of causation is our experience. We infer the existence of one object from another by experience, as we see a frequent conjunction of two objects. For instance, we see flame and the sensation heat. The objects we believe are causally connected exhibit regularity in their appearance. They appear in a regular recurrent order of contiguity and succession. We thus relate them as cause and effect and infer the existence of the one from that of the other. Hume asserts that, there are no impressions about the idea of necessary connection. Neither constant

conjunction nor the observation of regular sequences or causal connections suggests a causal relationship with certainty. We perceive no necessary relationship. In other words, ideas of matters of facts do not provide any necessary knowledge. Hume even says that it is not necessary that the sun will rise tomorrow. Necessity is the effect of observation of several instances of constant conjunction and it is the mind with attributes this to the world. It is only an internal impression of the mind. Necessity in the world of matters of fact is the result of the human mind's propensity to attribute regularity and order out of custom and habits. It is caused by custom or association, to pass from an observed thing to another that is constantly conjoined to it. Hume thus explains causality purely in psychological terms. Causal relationship is the psychological effect of observation of instances of constant conjunction. It is attributed to the tendency of the mind to pass naturally from one idea to another or from an impression to an idea. In this process owing to the custom, the mind passes beyond experience and expect that every event will have some cause. We believe that there are no uncaused events.

In his critique of the mind's ability to gain knowledge, Hume rejects the validity of inductive inference. He says that induction is the process of drawing inferences from past experiences of constant conjunction of two objects to present or future events. The principle of induction cannot be logically deduced from experience, as it involves a leap from the observed cases to the unobserved, which is uncertain. Hence inductive inferences are not logically necessary. We shall see more of these issues in the next chapter. In short Hume advocates skepticism of the world, the self and personal identity. He refutes the principle of causality and calls into question the validity of inductive reasoning, which is inevitable in scientific theorizing.

Quiz

1. According to Hume, ideas are:
(a) Caused by objects (b) Copies of impressions (c) Produced by qualities of objects (d) Caused by God.
2. According to Hume, what is the subject matter of the science of man?
(a) Origin of human passions and sentiments (b) Origin of human customs
(c) Origin and nature of knowledge (d) Rational psychology.
3. How does the association of ideas functions?

- (a) Uniting principle among ideas (b) Introducing new ideas (c) Inferring one idea from another (d) Separating one idea from another.
4. The truth of the propositions of the sciences of geometry, algebra and arithmetic is not?
- (a) Depend on the meanings of the terms (b) Can neither be confirmed nor be refuted by experience (c) Derived through induction (d) Formal in nature.
5. Which is not an element of the causal relationship?
- (a) Occasional association (b) Contiguity (c) Temporal priority (d) Necessary connection.

Answer Key

1. (b)
2. (c)
3. (a)
4. (c)
5. (a)

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NPTEL IITM

Chapter 19

David Hume: From Empiricism to Skepticism

Key Words:

Imagination, constancy, coherence, ideas, impressions, perceptions, skepticism, causality, induction, matters of fact, relations of ideas, rational cosmology, rational psychology, rational theology.

Introduction

Ever since Berkeley introduced subjective idealism that advocated “to be is to be perceived”, the empiricist school, has problematised the belief in the continuing existence of bodies independent of the knowing mind. David Hume too begins with the problem of the independent existence of the world, but takes us to very different conclusions, which made him one of the greatest thinkers of all times. Hume’s criticism was even more radical than Berkeley’s as he questions even the existence of the mind which Berkeley contended would exist as the perceiver of ideas. This is not very different from assuming that the mind exists as a thinking substance, as Descartes did.

Hume wonders what is the basis of this belief. He argues that, if every knowledge is derived from ideas and impressions, which are subjective, can we assume the existence of an external world? According to him, we cannot say that objects of the external world cause our impressions or perceptions, since perceptions or impressions, which we have, are different from objects of external world. There is no way we can know whether these perceptions are caused by anything in the external world, as experience only suggests the existence of perceptions. All our ideas are derived from impressions, the causes of which are unknown to us.

Like Berkeley, Hume too opposes the primary qualities—secondary qualities distinction and argues that we have no experience of such original qualities that cause impressions. Consequently, we cannot say anything about the external world and its objects. Whether they exist or not is unknown to us, as there is no evidence that the impressions are caused by external objects, or by an unknown substance, or by ourselves or by God. Hume thus argues that, the right approach in philosophy is to limit ourselves to our impressions and ideas and observe their relations. We can never know anything about the origin of our impressions. What lies behind the impressions are never known to us.

Hume thus does not deny the existence of material objects independently of our perceptions, but only says that we are unable to prove that they exist. He asks what is the cause, which induces us to believe in the continued existence of bodies distinct from our minds and perceptions. He explores the source of the idea that things continue to exist and says that our senses do not give us this knowledge. Senses reveal to us bodies which are not distinct from our perceptions and to reveal things which are distinct from perceptions, the senses have to operate when they have ceased to operate, which is a contradiction.

There are certain factors that prompt us to believe in the existence of an external World. We ascribe a distinct and continuous existence to some impressions and to some we do not. For example, we do not attribute distinct and continuous existence to impressions of pains and pleasures. On the other hand to certain other impressions like figure, bulk, motion and solidity, we attribute distinct and continuous existence, independently of perception. This is the basis of the belief in objects and subsequently of a belief in external world. But Hume attacks this conviction and asks what enables us to make these distinctions. He says that the senses do not induce us to believe in them and all impressions we get from senses are on the same footing. Even reason does not induce us to believe in them, as we cannot rationally justify them, as we cannot infer the existence of objects from perceptions.

Human imagination plays a crucial role in the belief in the continuous existence of an external world. The mind has a propensity to imagine that it exists. Constancy and coherence prompt the mind to believe in the continued existence of the world. Certain impressions that work upon the imagination induce us to believe in it. The aspect of constancy refers to the supposition of the distinct existence of bodies. In our experience we find that things appear in the same order and similar impressions constantly recur. This induces us to suppose that objects exist continuously. Bodies exhibit coherence even when they change their positions and qualities and the mind observes uniformity or coherence among impressions. Our memory helps us maintaining this continuity in imagination. The mind has the ability to forego the interruptions in the appearance of similar perceptions and form the image of the object in imagination.

Like his predecessor Berkeley, Hume too refers to the distinction between vulgar opinions, which are unreflective from more rational philosophical views, which distinguish between interrupted and mind-dependent perceptions and

continuous and independent objects. Again, like Berkeley, he too argues that perceptions are the only objects as there are no mind-independent material objects. The belief in mind-independent objects and their continued existence have generated several crucial philosophical issues, as we have seen in the philosophies of Locke and Berkeley. Locke conceived both material and mental substances are real and established this dualism of substances with his distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Berkeley rejected the mind-independent existence of material substances and also opposed the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, but failed to extend his criticism to the supposition of the existence of the psychic substance or mind. As demonstrated above, Hume has opposed all suppositions and postulations of existence that the elementary materials of experience, i.e., the impressions and ideas, do not suggest. There is nothing but only impressions.

With such a radical criticism of traditional metaphysical assumptions, Hume demonstrates the impossibility of a rational cosmology which deals with the origin and nature of the universe and rational psychology, which opposes the science of the immaterial, imperishable soul. Since we have to limit ourselves to our impressions and ideas, we cannot entertain metaphysical assumptions or beliefs. The famous statement “no matter, never mind” is articulated in this context.

While agreeing with Berkeley in criticizing the idea of material substance, Hume insists that it should be extended to the criticism of the so called psychic or thinking substance as well. Hume contends that it is pointless to enquire whether perceptions inhere in a material or an immaterial substance. Neither material nor immaterial substances are known to us. We do not have any impressions that produce the idea of such substances in us.

Opposing the possibility of a science of the soul or rational psychology, Hume affirms that no impression suggest the existence of such an entity. There is no evidence for the immateriality, indivisibility and the imperishability of the soul. It is never been perceived and we do not even know whether it exists or not. Hume suggests employing experimental methods in studying the spiritual substance. He says that, when he examines himself, he stumbles on some particular perception or other like heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure etc. He says that he comes across a bundle of different perceptions which succeed one another rapidly. He then describes the mind as a theatre where several perceptions make their appearance. Hume thus concludes that, there is no way to confirm that the mind is simple and

there is no clue about personal identity or the continued existence of the one and the same self in its various moments.

The concept of personal identity is based on the idea of a self that remains in a permanent state of self-identity. But Hume argues that self or person is not any one impression, as there is no impression which is constant and invariable. No impressions we have suggest the existence of such a constant and invariable soul. The idea of personal identity is therefore an imagined construct to which our several impressions and ideas refer.

Hume says that each perception is unique. Each is distinct, different and separable and there is no unity or real bond between these different impressions. The passing, re-passing and fading away impressions do not suggest the existence of a simple, indivisible soul. These fleeting impressions we have suggest neither any self-identity nor any continued existence. According to Hume the so-called self-identity is a quality we attribute to the perceptions because of the union of ideas in imagination. He says that our memory is the source of the idea of personal identity. It produces a relation of resemblance among our perceptions with the help of images of past perceptions. As mentioned above, imagination plays the lead role here. The chain of different perceptions is linked by association with each other due to resemblance and memory and this ultimately results in the appearance of a continued and persistent object. The interruptions occur in the succession of related perceptions are foregone by the mind and it sees identity instead of individual unrelated perceptions.

Hume's Rejection of the Self

Hume's celebrated refutation of the thinking substance (no matter, never mind) is based on the above mentioned argument. But Hume's rejection of the self does not amount to be saying that the self does not exist; it only argues that we cannot know whether there is a self or not. Hence Humean nihilism is not a metaphysical nihilism. As Russell observes, this conclusion is important in metaphysics, as getting rid of the last surviving use of "substance." It is important in theology, as abolishing all supposed knowledge of the "soul." It is important in the analysis of knowledge, since it shows that the category of subject and object is not fundamental. In this matter of the ego Hume made an important advance on Berkeley. (*A History of Western Philosophy*)

Hume's skepticism is the result of pursuing the empiricist program with rigorous consistency, which insists that absolutely certain knowledge is possible only in pure mathematics as it employs relations of ideas and do not refer to the world. With regard to matters of fact, there is only probability, as there we rely on experimental observations that reveal only discrete, distinct impressions. Hume thus outlines the limitations of human knowledge. He says that it is our natural propensity to consider perceptions or images as the external objects themselves. But since we have access only to our impressions, such a conclusion is unwarranted. The same reason is cited for rejecting the validity of causal relationship as well as inductive reasoning.

By questioning the validity of the belief in a mind-independent world of objects, along with the validity of the belief in a self-identical mind, in the principles of causality and induction, Hume challenges the fundamental assumptions of all natural sciences that consider these principles as important. The denial of induction in particular has more crucial implications. Hume points out that the principle of induction is justified on the basis of the law of uniformity of nature. But this law itself presupposes the validity of induction, as it is formulated on the basis of observing several incidents appearing with order and regularity. Hence the supposition of the principle of induction on the basis of the law of uniformity of nature involves circularity. For example, we assume that the sun will rise in the east tomorrow, because it has risen in the east in the past.

Hume argues that the belief in external world is a fundamentally problematic notion. There are prominently two theories of external perception that deal with this belief; one affirming it and the other rejecting it. While the first theory deals with our propensity to believe that objects exist as we see them the second one is the philosophical view, which states that we see only mental images. There is no way to prove that one of them is a better view than the other, as our natural reasoning process leads us to both of them from different directions. This points to the limitation of reason. Hume thus concludes that reason has certain limitations and it is the mind that has created the ideas of causality and necessity. Hume asserts that, "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office to serve and obey them." (Hume: *A Treatise on Human Reason*)

The Impact of Skepticism

Hume's skepticism had impacted many domains of human knowledge, more significantly it is bound to affect the course of development of natural sciences, theology and ethics. It called into question the very process of logical reasoning employed in natural sciences by questioning the validity of the principles of induction, causality and certainty. In theology, it criticized the cosmological argument, ontological argument and the argument from motion, which were advanced by theologians to prove the existence of God. Again, by separating the domain of value from the domain of facts, Hume questioned some basic assumptions of morality. He contends that, while reason deals with "what is the case", it is a concern of our sentiment to decide "what *ought to be* the case". Hume argues that morality is grounded in sentiment—in feelings, emotions etc.,—and not in reason, as it addresses the issue of "what *ought to be* the case". Hume adds that in morality the role of reason is secondary to sentiment, as virtues with which morality predominantly deals with, are traits which we find agreeable, which would warrant our approval or disapproval. Hence they are not issues with which reason would be dealing. It would be appropriate to quote Russell while concluding our discussions on Hume's philosophy and particularly his skepticism. Russell observes:

Hume's philosophy, whether true or false, represents the bankruptcy of eighteenth-century reasonableness....he arrives at the disastrous conclusion they from experience and observation nothing is to be learned. There is no such thing as rational belief: "If we believe that fire warms, or water refreshes, 'tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise. We cannot help believing, but no belief can be grounded in reason. Nor can one line of action be more rational than another, since all alike are based upon irrational convictions. [*A History of Western Philosophy*]

Quiz

1. Who opposes the primary qualities—secondary qualities distinction?
(a) Berkeley (b) Hume (c) Berkeley and Hume (d) Locke, Berkeley and Hume.
2. What according to Hume is the source of the idea that things continue to exist?
(a) Senses (b) Constancy and coherence of ideas (c) Reason (d) Induction.
3. Rational cosmology deals with?
(a) The origin and nature of the universe (b) The origin and nature of the soul
(c) The impossibility of natural sciences (d) The totality of existence.
4. The self dealt by rational psychology is not?
5. (a) Indivisible (b) Material (c) Imperishable (d) Simple.

6. To which of the following statements would Hume subscribe to?
- (i) Certain knowledge is possible only in relations of ideas.
 - (ii) Matters of fact provide certainty only when the right method is applied.
 - (iii) Matters of fact is always probable.
 - (iv) Relations of ideas is also occasionally uncertain.
- (a) (iii) alone (b) (i) and (ii) (c) (i) and (iii) (d) (111) and (iv)

Answer key

- 1. [c]
- 2. [b]
- 3. [a]
- 4. [b]
- 5. [c]

Assignment

- 1. Describe how does Hume explain our belief in the continued existence of objects.
- 2. How does Hume reject the impossibility of rational cosmology, rational psychology and rational theology?

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NPTEL IITM

Chapter 20

The Critical Philosophy Of Immanuel Kant

Key Words

Critical philosophy, analytic judgement, synthetic judgement, a priori, a posteriori, synthetic a priori, transcendental critique, Copernican revolution in philosophy.

Introduction

Immanuel Kant is a very special philosopher for various reasons. By the time of his birth in 1724, the great epistemological traditions of empiricism and rationalism have already reached their heights and enlightenment Europe was struggling to arrive at a consensus with regard to the central issues related to theory of knowledge. Both the traditions have their influences and given the apparently contradicting presuppositions of their theoretical positions it was hard to find a meeting point or arrive at a consensus. There was a need for a synoptical mind with extraordinary philosophical virtuosity to reconcile them and to derive from their counterproductive opposition something more enlightening. Kant endeavours to do this by adopting the essential features of modern philosophy; its critical attitude, its reluctance to accept authority and tradition and its faith in human understanding to arrive at knowledge.

On the one hand, Kant was inspired by the Wollfian tradition of rationalism and was also influenced by Leibniz, but soon he found some of the assumptions of the rationalist thinkers too simplistic and dogmatic. In his search for a more reasonable account of human knowledge Kant turned to the British Empiricist thinkers, and all the three great empiricists, Locke, Berkeley and Hume have attracted his attention. He was particularly fascinated by the radical criticism of David Hume. Kant has stated that it was Hume who had awakened him from his dogmatic slumbers.

Kant had written three *Critiques*, apart from some other books dealing with various aspects of philosophy. The three *Critiques* are : *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Judgement*. The first *Critique* examines the process of knowledge acquisition that happens in the domain of natural sciences and eventually draws a limit to our

understanding with respect to this realm. The second Critique addresses the problem of moral judgement and here too Kant examines the preconditions that enable the human mind to arrive at such judgements. The third *Critique* deals with the problem of aesthetic judgement and in a sense attempts to unify the domains of pure natural sciences with the domain of ethics.

Kant's Critical Philosophy

Kant is considered as the most important philosopher of the enlightenment and is often called the prophet of enlightenment as the spirit of enlightenment finds its most comprehensive expression in his Critical Philosophy. In the very conceptualization of Critical philosophy, the influence of Hume is visible. Hume's philosophy has expressed a radical doubt about the power of human mind in gaining genuine knowledge with certainty, particularly about the natural world which deals with "matters of fact", about which he affirms only probability is possible. He has demonstrated the impossibility of rational theology, rational cosmology, and rational psychology and consequently had shown that it is impossible to gain knowledge of God, world, and soul. Hume's philosophy is an instance where reason turns its critical gaze on itself. The spirit of modern philosophy consists in its undermining all authority and tradition and in Hume's philosophy it reaches a point where reason turns to itself and attempts to find out the limitations of our understanding.

Hume had contended that necessary knowledge is possible only in relations of ideas and not with regard to matters of fact. He had exhibited that causal relationship, the validity of which is presupposed in natural sciences, is actually based on custom and attributed it to the habit of the mind. Kant has observed that if Hume is right, then there will be only empirical sciences and formal exercises of calculation. All necessary truths would deal with relations of ideas and hence would be analytical. Propositions that express matters of fact would be synthetic truths and hence are merely contingent. In this context Kant's objective can be understood as consisting in endeavouring "to limit Hume's skepticism on the one hand, and the old dogmatism on the other, and to refute and destroy materialism, fatalism, atheism, as well as sentimentalism and superstition." He decides to carry out a critical Investigation into the powers of the pure reason itself. Here he agrees with Hume to a great extent, but opposes the latter's radical skepticism. On

the other hand, he opposes the dogmatism which was visible in the philosophies of many rationalists who uncritically took for granted the powers of pure reason.

Unlike Hume, Kant never doubted the possibility of genuine knowledge. Nor did he doubt the powers of human understanding in arriving at knowledge about matters of fact. His critical enquiry seeks to know how reason arrives at some principles which it has long been in the habit of employing in gaining knowledge. He endeavours to understand in what way reason has arrived at these principles. In his explanation of this process Kant's synoptical mind attempts reconciling the different and contradictory views held by his predecessors. He thus develops a method which examines the nature and limit of human knowledge by analyzing the knowing mind.

One important feature of the philosophy of the Enlightenment is its separation between the world and knowledge about the world, which is also a separation between the knowing mind and its object of knowledge and between thought and reality. As we have seen above, rationalism and empiricism provide different accounts about this cleavage and Kant's attempt is to bring together the separated elements to a unified whole. The critical method he proposes addresses this issue by examining what lies at the basis of the distinction between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* sources of knowledge, which would also establish the exact scope and function of such forms of knowledge. In other words, he endeavours understanding the distinction between what the mind discovers to be necessary and universal and what it gains from experience. This is one of the major objectives of the Critical Method he employs.

Important Features of Critical Method

By understanding the distinction between the necessary knowledge that is *a priori* and experiential knowledge that is contingent and *a posteriori*, Kant's critical philosophy attempts to know the nature and limitation of human knowledge. Eventually this takes him to consider a reconciliation of the two opposing views about the source of knowledge; one which emphasizes on reason and the other on experience. Kant sees that this distinction can be understood also as a distinction between the analytical and synthetical judgments.

The critical method employs a transcendental critique of reason. It seeks to locate the universal and necessary elements in all knowledge in the nature of our thought and is not interested in any specific instance of knowing. In other words, it focuses on the unique kind of knowledge which is common to all experience. In this sense the transcendental inquiry is not a psychological inquiry into the nature of reason considered as a psychical entity. It rather deals with the very preconditions of the possibility of knowledge or the pure conditions in the human subject that enables the cognition of objects.

The Critical investigation begins with Kant highlighting the limitations of the two available models of cognition; rationalism and empiricism. He disagreed with Locke's crude empiricism which argued that all our concepts are ultimately derived from experience. He would rather argue that, though our knowledge necessarily has an empirical counterpart, as it necessarily arise from experience, it is not completely exhaustive of this empirical content. There must be something which enables the experience to appear in a meaningful manner. Here Kant agrees with the rationalists who emphasize on the innate structures of the mind. But he nevertheless disagreed with them with regard to the notion of innate ideas which assumes that all human knowledge are native to the mind. Though he acknowledges that there are some *a priori* concepts and principles which the reason derives from within itself on the occasion of experience, they alone would not be sufficient to explain the process of knowledge acquisition. They are preconditions which would find their application on the data supplied by empirical experience.

In other words, these *a priori* concepts are grounded in the mind's own structure. These pure concepts are devoid of all empirical content. They are not derived from experience but is applied to and governs experience. In this sense they do not transcend experience, but are the preconditions of the latter. For instance, the idea of causation, which Hume would deny as a necessary or *a priori* idea. According to Kant it is neither innate—in the sense that we are born with it—nor is it the result of induction—as Hume would contend. Instead, but our reason derives it from within itself. Kant carries out his further analysis with an examination of the various kinds of judgements as he thought that the structure of the human mind can be derived by analyzing the structure of judgements.

Analysis of Judgements

The first classification is between the analytic and synthetic judgements. The analytic are judgements whose predicate is already contained in the subject and hence is merely explicative. It simply explicates some obvious and essential characteristic of the subject. For example, a bachelor is an unmarried man. This statement does not add anything new to our knowledge which is discovered in terms of empirical verification. In synthetic judgements the predicate adds some characteristic attribute to the nature of the subject. Such judgements give us information about some aspect of the subject which we do not get through a mere analysis of the idea of the subject. For example, my car is white.

Kant argues that all analytic statements are *a priori*, as they are true by definition and certain, though they contain no information about the factual world. Since their predicate is logically contained in the subject their negation would be meaningless. On the other hand synthetic judgements are of two types: synthetic *a posteriori* and synthetic *a priori*. The former types of judgements are contingent, though they contain information about the factual world. This is because they are not certain. Their truth depends on perception. The other type of synthetic propositions Kant calls synthetic *a priori* propositions. The first Critique deals with these type of judgements.

By distinguishing synthetic *a posteriori* from synthetic *a priori*, Kant dismisses Hume's dichotomy between analytic and synthetic (relations of ideas and matters of fact). He asserted the possibility of our forming any synthetic judgments which have a purely *a priori* origin. Kant never doubts the possibility of such judgements, as he affirms that they are possible and the very possibility of natural sciences like physics testify their existence. For example, " $2+2=4$ ", "a straight line is the shortest distance between two points" and "Every event has a cause" are synthetic *a priori* statements. He rather raises the question, how such judgements are possible. They are judgments which thought itself discovers and the conditions that assure their possibility constitute the necessary and indispensable conditions of the very possibility of any sense experience whatsoever. All mathematical propositions are *synthetic a priori* as they depend on intuition.

According to Kant, all mathematical propositions apply such *a priori* concepts to space and time, which are also a-priori. Geometry and physics too employ them. Kant maintains that their truth is

dependent on intuition, but independent of empirical experience. They rather make empirical experience possible. The two sciences of geometry and arithmetic employ intuitions of space and time respectively. Physics, on the other hand, has both *synthetic a posteriori* or empirical propositions and *synthetic a priori* propositions.

As mentioned above, synthetic a priori propositions are judgements that are both synthetic and demonstrable a priori. To answer the question, how are synthetic a priori propositions possible, Kant proposes a transcendental critical enquiry to the very conditions of experience. He examines what sort of truth they have. These propositions are arrived at, not by experience but by reasoning. However, they are substantially true of the world. In other words, their truths are necessary like mathematics but they are applied to experience and explain the very possibility of sense impressions.

By explaining the possibility of synthetic a priori propositions Kant intends to overcome the skeptical threat posed by Hume. Their possibility would demonstrate the possibility of natural sciences which presuppose the possibility of experience which is universal and necessary. Scientific knowledge is constitutive of such propositions which are universal and necessary, which nevertheless are also true about the world. This universality aspect owes to the structure of the mind which determines the structure of these judgements. Hence synthetic a priori judgements also say something about ourselves: about the structure of our mind. What the world is to us is the world as we experience it. But our capacities for experiencing anything would impose a restriction on the kind of world our world could be. With this Kant reconciles rationalism with empiricism and explains the possibility of genuine scientific knowledge.

The transcendental critique of reason thus demonstrates the preconditions of knowledge. Kant admits that all our knowledge begins with experience. But he proceeds further from this empiricist contention and affirms that knowledge however, does not arise out of experience. The mind plays a crucial role in this process by determining and providing the a priori preconditions of the very possibility of knowledge. This is known as Kant's Copernican Revolution in Philosophy.

Copernican Revolution in Philosophy

Kant's transcendental critique thus deals with the general conditions of the employment of human faculties. It affirms that, though on the one hand our knowledge should conform to objects, the objects also must conform to our knowledge in the sense that the nature of our faculties determines what the case in the world is.

In this regard, it has been argued that Kant has initiated a Copernican revolution in philosophy; a revolution in philosophy which is akin to the revolution Copernicus initiated in astronomy by proposing a helio-centric view. Kant counters the existing views about the cognition of the world by the mind. It has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects of the outside world. The empiricists, particularly John Locke argues for a representationalist model of knowledge acquisition, where the ideas received by the mind were assumed to have their originals in an external world. Though many other models of knowledge acquisition do not comply with a form of naïve representationalism, no satisfactory explanation was proposed which would convincingly replace it. Hume's suggestion amounted to skepticism, which instead of explaining the possibility of knowledge, would reject the very legitimacy of its acquisition by the human mind. The rationalists, he felt are too dogmatic in assuming that the *a priori* ideas alone would explain the process.

Kant's Copernican revolution thus attempts presenting a more satisfactory, more convincing model, which would also simultaneously reconcile the contradicting views proposed by his predecessors. He keeps the thinking mind at the center and emphasizes its crucial role in knowing the world, which however are accessed only through perception. He stresses on the important contribution of the innate and *a priori* structures of the mind in receiving the sense impressions, which do not reach the mind as a chaotic whole, but as an already ordered regularity. This regularity is imposed by the mind even at the very stage of having sensations. The mind is thus at the center of the knowing process, though knowledge is not purely innate as the rationalists thought it was. Kant concludes: "Percepts without concepts are blind and concepts without percepts are empty".

The Copernican revolution of Kant has very important consequences. If the objects must conform to our cognition as stated by Kant, then that would imply certain limitations of our knowledge and our understanding. This would definitely reject any possibility of having

knowledge about a world or reality that is not given to us through our senses. We would never have a direct access to the world outside us, as all our knowledge is necessarily mediated through our sensations and the *a priori* structure of our mind.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is not true of Kant?
[a] He never doubted the possibility of genuine knowledge [b] He doubted the powers of human understanding in arriving at knowledge about matters of fact [c] Sought to know how reason arrives at the *a priori* principles of understanding. [d] Examines the nature and limit of human knowledge.
2. Kant's Critical philosophy does not include:
[a] Understanding the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge [b] Understanding the distinction between what the mind discovers to be necessary and universal and what it gains from experience [c] to know the nature and limitation of human knowledge [d] To know the metaphysical basis of all reality.
3. The transcendental critique of reason consists in:
[a] Locating the universal and necessary elements in all knowledge [b] Understanding the *a priori* categories of the mind that it employs in mathematical knowledge [c] A psychological inquiry into the nature of reason [d] A psychological and logical inquiry into the nature of knowledge acquisition
4. Kant's transcendental critique deals with:
(a) Transcendental subjectivity (b) The real nature and structure of the human mind
(c) The general conditions of the employment of human faculties (d) The peculiarities of rational enquiry.
5. Which is not held by Kant?
(a) What the world is to us is the world as we experience it (b) Our capacities for experiencing anything would impose a restriction on the kind of world our world could be (c) All knowledge arise out of experience (d) Synthetic *a priori* propositions are found in natural science.

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [d]
3. [a]
4. [c]
5. [c]

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Chapter 21

Kant: Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic

Key Words: Intuition, synthetic function of mind, forms of sensibility, space, time, *a priori* forms of the mind, categories of understanding.

In the previous chapter, we have examined the notion of synthetic *a priori* propositions. It is with the demonstration of the possibility of such propositions Kant initiates his Copernican revolution in philosophy. This chapter examines this further with an elaboration of the various aspects of the synthetic *a priori* propositions.

As the term indicates, these types of propositions are both synthetic and *a priori*. They are synthetic because they are based on and depend on sense experience. They require percepts from an external source. In other words, our experience of the world must be perceivable and it must be about a world that exists outside. They are *a priori* as they presuppose certain elements that are not derived from experience. It refers to a faculty of the mind that facilitates a reception of the percepts from external sources and their further ordering in order to develop a system of knowledge. This psychic counterpart in the knowledge acquisition process is innate. Kant thus says that our experience of the world must be thinkable as well. It should say something about us. Kant combines these two essential aspects of knowledge and conceives them as constituting the very preconditions of knowledge.

The first precondition asserts the experiential aspect. Kant says that knowledge is possible only about a world that we can experience. But the experiential knowledge is thinkable only if there is some regularity in what is known. Kant further affirms that this regularity is possible only if there is some knower in whom that regularity can be represented. Asserting the importance of both the experiential and the *a priori* aspects of knowledge—the empiricist and rationalist counterparts—Kant declares that concepts without percepts are empty and percepts without concepts are blind.

The Role of Intuition

If we explore the beginning of knowledge, we realize the importance of intuition, as the only way in which our knowledge can relate immediately to objects is by means of an intuition. This factor asserts the importance of an external world of objects. An intuition can take place only in so far as an object is given to us; only when our subject is affected by the object. According to Kant, the capacity for receiving representations of objects by being affected by them is named sensibility. With regard to this factor, Kant seems to be agreeing with empiricism.

But Kant disagrees with those empiricists who conceive mind as a passive receiver of sensations or percepts. He argues that the synthetic function of thought is active from the very beginning. Kant thus refers to the constructive power of understanding and argues that even in the reception of sensations the human mind is active. He thus opposes the photographic theory of sense perception and replaces it with the theory which asserts that perceptions are produced by the active working of thought upon the sensory material. In other words, Kant affirms that seeing is thinking.

Transcendental Philosophy: Preliminary Assumptions

The *Critique of Pure Reason* deals with three transcendental domains; the transcendental aesthetic, transcendental analytic and transcendental dialectic. The transcendental aesthetic deals with the problem of sensibility and hence addresses several issues related to sense perception. The transcendental analytic addresses problems related to the relating of various perceptions and the third one, transcendental dialectic deals with reasoning, as it addresses issues related to inference.

The transcendental approach, as mentioned above focuses on the preconditions, rather than a mere description of what happens. It addresses those factors that are indispensable and necessary in the perception and understanding of objects in the world. The transcendental aesthetic thus deals with those indispensable factors that are preconditions of all perceptions. It deals with the elements present in the sensory processes, but are not qualities of any particular objects of perception. Since they deal with preconditions, they have an *a priori* and not an empirical origin and hence are transcendental.

Kant focuses on those common forms in which all objects of sense perception show themselves in experience and identifies the variable and constant elements in the knowledge we gain through

senses. The variable elements refer to the qualities of the object that distinguish it from other objects and the constant elements are space and time. Among the latter, space is observed by the outer sense and time by the inner sense. Together they are referred to as “forms of sensibility”.

According to Kant, space and time are the constant elements in the objects of perceptions and they themselves are not the result of inductive generalizations of experience. Things appear in space, and are connected with some point or period of time. Kant maintains that all experience is conditioned by them and though they themselves are not experienced, they show themselves in experience. Kant considers them as the *a priori* forms of the mind according to which it arranges sensations and which have their origin in the very nature of thought itself.

Kant further elaborates this by stating that, it is not that we are at first aware of unordered sensations and then we subject them to the *a priori* forms of space and time. He affirms that we are never faced with unordered sensations, as ordering is a condition of awareness or consciousness, not a consequence of it. He maintains that all representations are determinations of the mind and hence are universal and necessary. He holds that all experience must conform to constraints imposed by space and time, which are nothing but forms that are imposed by the nature of the mind which conceives them. Hence they are the subjective conditions imposed upon experience by us. But their application is conditional and limited. They are applied only to things as appearing to us and not to things-in-themselves. They are essentially conditions for the possibility of appearances.

According to Kant, space and time are empirically real but transcendently ideal. They are empirically real because, what is given in experience is in space and in time. Again, they are transcendently ideal, because the sphere of phenomena is the only sphere of their validity, and that they do not apply to things-in-themselves, considered apart from their appearance to us. Kant also asserts that they are not mere illusions.

Transcendental Analytic

Transcendental analytic deals with the co-operation of sensibility and understanding in human knowledge. Sensibility refers to the faculty of receiving impressions and understanding stands for the power of thinking the data received from sensations using concepts. Kant’s transcendental logic is therefore, concerned with the *a priori* concepts and principles of the understanding and their application to objects. It studies the *a priori* concepts and principles of the understanding as

necessary conditions for us to even think about objects. In other words, it examines the *a priori* concepts of understanding by which the human mind synthesizes the phenomena.

The primary task of transcendental analytic is to ascertain the *a priori* concepts of the understanding with an examination of the faculty of judgment or the power of thought. Kant thus examines human thinking process and analyses the judgements by means of which human understanding functions. He reduces all operations of the understanding to judgments and examines what are the possible kinds of judgements. The process of judging is a unique logical operation carried out by the human mind. To judge and to think are not two distinct acts. In such acts the human mind unifies different representations with the aid of concepts in order to form one cognition. In other words, judgements synthesize representations by means of concepts.

Kant introduces another crucial notion in this context; the notion of categories of understanding. As mentioned above, the process of understanding involves a process of judging, which actually is a process of synthesizing. Kant examines how this is carried out by the mind. He seeks to examine the different ways of judging and contends that the number of possible ways of judging and the number of logical types of judgment are identical. Logicians have already identified that there are 12 types of judgements and Kant seeks to know why these, and only these, forms of judgment are possible.

Kant affirms that each form of judgment is determined by an *a priori* concept. According to him these *a priori* concepts reflect the fundamental synthesizing functions of the understanding. They actually stand for the possible ways in which the human mind synthesizes the percepts it receives through sensations. Kant calls them categories of understanding. He thus identifies the very process of understanding with the unifying or synthesizing or judging power of the mind. He asserts that the mind does this because it possesses an *a priori* categorical structure. It necessarily synthesizes representations in certain fundamental ways, according to these basic categories. He maintains that the categories of the understanding are *a priori* conditions for knowledge. They are the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of objects being thought. The following table summarises the 12 categories which Kant places under four broad categories of understanding: of quality, quantity, modality and relations.

CATEGORY OF QUANTITY

CATEGORY OF QUALITY

JUDGEMENTS	CATEGORIES	JUDGEMENTS	CATEGORIES
Universal	Unity	Affirmative	Reality
Particular	Plurality	Negative	Negation
Singular	Totality	Infinite	Limitation

CATEGORY OF MODALITY		CATEGORY OF RELATIONS	
JUDGEMENTS	CATEGORIES	JUDGEMENTS	CATEGORIES
Problematic	Possibility/ impossibility	Categorical	Inherence & subsistence
Assertoric	Existence/non-existence	Hypothetical	Causality & dependence
Apodectic	Necessity/contingency	Disjunctive	Community

These 12 categories constitute the *a priori* structure that determines human understanding by guiding the functioning of pure reason. As mentioned above, even before the categories synthesize the percepts in understanding, the sensations caused by the world are ordered by the forms of intuition, space and time. Such an ordering is necessarily required in order that objects should be given to us. These ordered sensations are further categorized by the 12 categories of understanding in order to frame knowledge of the phenomenal world. These categories are thus the *a priori* conditions of all experience, which determine the conditions of the possibility of experience. In other words, they refer to the conditions which are necessarily required for objects to be *thought*. Objects cannot be thought except through the synthesizing categories of the understanding. For instance, to know that there are 10 green apples and 12 red mangoes in a basket, the mind should *a priori* possess the ability to quantify (10 apples and 12 mangoes) and grasp the qualities of being green and red. To know that heat causes warmth, the mind should know to connect the two percepts with each other in causal terms. Concepts without percepts are empty and percepts without concepts are blind.

Kant's Critique of Pure Reason: An Assessment

The two transcendental approaches—*aesthetic* and *analytic*—explain how sensibility and understanding cooperate in order to provide us an account of the empirical reality. It thus tries to understand the process of knowledge acquisition in natural sciences. Kant places the human mind at the center, which we have already seen in the previous chapter when we have discussed the idea of Copernican revolution in philosophy. The exact nature of this revolution is clear with an explication of the transcendental *aesthetic* and *analytic*. It underlines the crucial role the human mind plays in the process of knowledge acquisition.

Kant's exposition of the nature of pure reason has more important consequences. His critical approach suggests that in our knowledge about the world the human mind and its synthesizing function play crucial roles. Hence, we can never know the “real” world of entities, but only a world which is given to us through our percepts and further synthesized by the concepts. The ultimately real is never accessible by us, as all our access to the world is mediated through percepts that are spatio-temporally ordered and concepts which constitute the *a priori* structure of the mind. Therefore, Kant mentions about a domain of reality which is mind-independent, which is the ultimate source of our percepts, but maintains that this domain remains unknown forever.

Kant's transcendental critique of pure reason thus points to the limitations of human knowledge. It explains how our knowledge about the world is derived from the senses and what role does our understanding play in the process of converting the sense data into knowledge. Kant tells us that this knowledge is essentially constrained by the conditions our mind imposes and he calls it phenomena. The phenomenal world is the world as we see it with our preconditions and limitations. On the other hand, the real world, constitutive of the things-in-themselves or noumena is always unknown. We can never have knowledge about them owing to the limitations of our faculty of understanding. This suggests the impossibility of metaphysics as a science. To gain knowledge we need the sensations that are ordered by the forms of sensibility and further they are synthesized by the 12 categories which are the *a priori* preconditions of understanding. Metaphysical reality or things in themselves cannot be comprehended in this fashion as they are necessarily beyond our understanding which is constrained by space and time.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is not held by Kant?
(a) Mind is a passive receiver of sensations (b) The synthetic function of thought is active from the very beginning (c) The photographic theory of sense perception is incorrect (d) Seeing is thinking.
2. In what way does transcendental philosophy deal with experience?
(a) Describes what happens when we experience (b) Explains the psychological aspects involved in experience (c) Addresses the preconditions of experience (d) Explains how experience leads to knowledge.
3. According to Kant, space and time?
(a) Are known through inductive generalizations of experience (b) Are variable elements in the objects of perceptions (c) They only show themselves in experience (d) They are not a priori.
4. Space and time are not?
(a) Applied to things-in-themselves (b) Forms imposed by the nature of the mind (c) Subjective conditions imposed upon experience by us (d) Are essentially conditions for the possibility of appearances.
5. Kant identifies the process of understanding with
(a) Synthesizing power of the mind (b) Forms of sensibility (c) Categories of quantity (d) Categories of modality

Answer Key

1. [a]
2. [c]
3. [c]
4. [a]
5. [a]

Assignments

1. Describe Kant's notion of forms of sensibility.
2. Discuss Kant's idea of transcendental analytic.

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Chapter 22

Immanuel Kant:

The Ideas of Reason and the Rejection of Speculative Metaphysics

Key Words: Ideas of reason, transcendental dialectic, reason, understanding, things-in-themselves, noumena, antinomies, transcendental illusion, transcendental ideal, philosophical theology.

This chapter will deal with the notion of the “ideas of reason”, which is central to Kant’s philosophy. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Kant’s first Critique can be understood by elaborating the three transcendental approaches; transcendental aesthetic, transcendental analytic and transcendental dialectic. We have already discussed the first two in the previous chapter and in this chapter we shall focus more on the third. Kant says that the human mind is constituted of two aspects; understanding and reason. We have already seen the function of understanding in the previous chapter. Kant places reason slightly above understanding in terms of its importance in the process of knowledge acquisition.

Transcendental dialectic, as Kant conceived, is a critique of understanding and reason. Here he critically examines their [understanding and reason] abilities to provide knowledge of things-in-themselves. In other words, he intends to expose the limitations of these human rational faculties, when the question is about noumena. Human reason falls short of the comprehension of the ultimate reality of things or things-in-themselves. He thus warns about the misuse of the *a priori* concepts and principles and affirms that the use of these two aspects of the thinking faculty in order to comprehend things in themselves lead to certain insoluble contradictions. He thus cautions us about the illegitimate extension of the *a priori* concepts from the objects given in sense intuition to things in general.

The transcendental dialectic thus affirms that the cognitive function of the categories are limited to the objects of sense intuition or phenomena and it is not possible to have universal and necessary or *a priori* knowledge of anything non-perceivable. Kant has no doubt about the existence of such a world of things in themselves or noumena lying behind the sensible world. But this noumenal domain cannot be comprehended employing the usual faculties of reason and understanding. Yet the mind has a tendency to conceptualize them and to contemplate about them, which Kant warns, can lead to certain riddles. The human mind tries to frame conceptions of God, freedom and immortality that

constitute the noumenal reality. But this may lead to confusions and contradictions. Applying the categories of understanding to noumena leads to illusions. He maintains that thought can never explore what lies behind nature or the thinkable world as its ultimate ground. Noumena can never become a proper object of our investigation. Hence Kant contends that metaphysics as a science is impossible.

The Impossibility of Metaphysics

According to Kant, metaphysics attempts deducing *a priori* synthetic knowledge from the pure concepts of the understanding. He says that this is to employ concepts alone without precepts. For example, when a metaphysician talks about cosmos or the totality of existence, there are certain concepts employed, but there are no perceptions corresponding to them. Kant categorically asserts that, in such cases no genuine knowledge is derivable, as concepts without intuitions are empty. This asserts the impossibility of metaphysics. Kant further points out that, applying *a priori* concepts to things-in-themselves leads to antinomies. Therefore, he excludes metaphysics as a possible source of objective knowledge. Questions which are legitimate when asked about the world of experience are meaningless when asked about the transcendental reality. For example, notions like cause and effect, substance and accident are legitimate when applied to the phenomenal order. But once we attempt to employ them to legitimise the functioning of the noumenal world, they lead to nonsense.

Transcendental Illusion and Transcendental Dialectic

As indicated above, the principles of understanding are immanent principles. They are in us, imposing limitation on our abilities to comprehend the world. They also function as preconditions of our cognition, as they can be effectively employed for objectively comprehending the phenomenal reality. But as mentioned above, their application should be limited to the phenomenal domain, as these principles which enable us to cognize the world are essentially subjective and not objective. Kant argues that mistaking immanent or subjective principles for objective or transcendent principles may result in error and illusion. The application of subjective principles to things-in-themselves leads to what Kant calls transcendental illusion. The transcendental dialectic is intended to free us from this dogmatical or transcendental illusion. It is therefore, a critique that will limit our speculative pretensions to the sphere of possible experience. In other words, transcendental dialectic intends to free us from our transcendental illusions. It also explores the role of transcendental ideas in our thinking. This aspect of the critical philosophy deals with an examination of the faculty of reason and its negative and positive roles.

Negative and positive Roles of Reason

In connection with the critique of reason, Kant identifies its negative and positive roles. On the negative side, as we have seen above, reason leads to transcendental illusion. Thus it is the source of all metaphysical errors. It also leads us to antinomies.

On the positive side, Kant sees that reason has a necessary and crucial role, as it is the source of the necessary ideas and principles that play vital roles in scientific theorizing. It thus examines the higher processes of reason to see whether it is possible to discover the ultimate nature of things in themselves. In this sense, it is also the source of the transcendental concepts or ideas of the self, the world and God.

With the explication of these transcendental principles, Kant's philosophy presents itself as a complete system, which links the immanent principles with the transcendental realities in order to explain the very idea of rational knowledge and its possibility. The immanent principles are also known as *a priori* concepts of understanding. They are subjective principles that are applied within the confines of possible experience. On the other hand, transcendental principles are known as the concepts of reason, or *ideas of reason*. They are principles that transcend the confines of possible experience and are necessarily objective. Kant insists that, in order to avoid confusions, we have to distinguish the subjective *a priori* concepts of understanding which are immanent from the objective *ideas of reason* which are transcendental.

To understand the positive function of reason, we may have to see how Kant has distinguished it from understanding. Kant assigns a higher status to reason as he conceives it as representing a higher function of the mind than the understanding. Reason is understood as the mind's activity which inquires about its own operations. Kant in this context affirms that metaphysics is the occupation of reason with itself. On the other hand, understanding deals with objects of knowledge in experience. As we have already seen, understanding here refers particular percepts to general concepts or the categories of understanding in order to obtain knowledge about the phenomenal realm.

The positive functions of reason now become clearer and the transcendental dialectic addresses this issue. As mentioned above, the transcendental dialectic examines pure reason as a faculty distinct from understanding and also attempts to determine what are the transcendental ideas of pure reason. It tries to find out the legitimate and proper function of the ideas of pure reason. For instance, the metaphysical ideas of a cosmos and a self are being examined. We can never have synthetic *a priori* knowledge about them. Kant warns us against the extension of the application of the categories and

concepts of pure reason in understanding them. On the other hand he affirms that these ideas of pure reason have a very important role in human thinking. Transcendental dialectic tries to find out their legitimate function. Kant maintains that they arise in us through the very nature of our reason and reason has to find it out within itself, by turning its gaze to itself.

The transcendental dialectic therefore, explores the proper function of the ideas of pure reason, which are determined by the constitution of our reason. It also warns us against its misuse. It shows that the ideas of purer reason are inherent in the nature of reason itself and therefore, are not derived empirically. Nevertheless, they are not innate. Kant repeatedly maintains that they are the transcendental ideas produced by pure reason and reason contains within itself the source of these Ideas. They are the foundations for reason's construction and account of the systematic unity of experience, without which no knowledge would be possible. The synthetic function of reason is reflected in the construction of the transcendental ideas of the self, cosmos and God. The self is conceived as a permanent substantial subject, about which we can never have synthetic a priori knowledge. But Kant says that the self should exist as a transcendental idea. The same is the case with cosmos. For Kant the world as a totality of events which are causally connected with each other exists. The transcendental idea of God is more important than the other two, as it accounts for the totality of all existence. It is conceived as the unity of the objects of thought in general. Kant calls it a transcendental ideal, as even the other two, cosmos and self, are united in God.

Kant maintains that, the human mind continually swings back to these ideas of reason. He refers to the human propensity to grasp things as a whole and the ideas of reason enable us to do this. But they are not merely fictional or arbitrary, as they project an ideal toward which knowledge is directed. Kant affirms that they are not given through the ordinary channels of experience, but they arise in us through the very nature of our reason. In other words, they have their function determined by the constitution of our reason. At the level of understanding itself—where the mind applies concepts to percepts—an important synthesizing function is performed. Kant argues that, with the ideas of reason, reason tends completing the synthesis achieved by the understanding.

To provide a justification for his arguments, Kant turns to syllogistic reasoning and argues that the ideas of reason are deduced from the forms of mediate inference or syllogistic inference. He realizes that the processes of reason is essentially syllogistic and ventures examining the three forms of syllogistic procedure; categorical, hypothetical and disjunctive. Corresponding to the categorical syllogism, there is the psychological idea of the self, to the hypothetical syllogism, the cosmological idea of the world and to the disjunctive syllogism, the theological idea of God.

Thus in the three forms of syllogistic procedure the three types of possible mediate inferences are reflected. Kant says that, corresponding to them, there are three categories of relation; substance, which is represented by the self, cause, represented by the idea of cosmos and community or reciprocity represented by God. He further argues that corresponding to the three types of inferences there are three kinds of unconditioned unities, postulated or assumed by the principles of pure reason. Each idea of reason thus represents a unity.

Here too Kant derives the three kinds of unconditioned unity from the three types of syllogistic inferences. He explains how the three ideas of reason are derived. He argues that, ascending by a chain of categorical syllogisms reason seeks something which is always a subject and never a predicate. This is the idea of the self. Again, ascending by a chain of hypothetical syllogisms, reason demands an unconditioned unity which is an ultimate presupposition. The cosmos is such a presupposition. Finally, ascending by a chain of disjunctive syllogisms reason demands an unconditioned unity, which is found in the idea of God.

In order to explain the legitimacy of the syllogistic process, Kant falls back on the natural propensity of the mind to expect that its knowledge should be capable of unification and systematisation. Hence the nature of the syllogistic procedure suggests the metaphysical ideas of God, of self and the world. This propensity forces us to see the particular cases in the light of the universal which accounts for them. Human thought looks for some complete, central and all-comprehensive idea.

Ideas of Reason and Metaphysics

In the domain of metaphysics, these three ideas of reason have corresponding representatives and the three ideas of reason correspond to the three branches of speculative metaphysics. There is the notion of the “thinking subject”, which psychology deals with, the “world” which cosmology deals with and “God”, which theology deals with. They are not given in experience and they do not constitute part of the phenomenal reality. For Kant, this metaphysics is impossible as we can have no genuine knowledge about them. Kant thus examines each one of them. For instance, the idea of the self. Kant says that this notion is the result of the mind’s propensity to seek for a common ground for all phenomena that occur in consciousness. Here it demands the possibility of a subject, which is always a subject, and never a predicate of some other subject. For the possibility of experience all representations should be related to the unity of apperception and the conception of the self is rooted in this assumption. The self therefore, is the *I think* that accompanies all experiences. Reason seeks to complete the synthesis of the inner life in the idea of a central self or the absolute subject of our

experiences. It passes beyond the empirical and the conditioned ego to the unconditioned substantial subject.

Kant observes that, psychology studies the empirical ego, which is an object in time and is reducible to successive states as the self. It is a part of the world of experience. On the other hand, the Transcendental ego is a necessary condition for experience. It is not given in experience and hence we cannot apply the categories of substance and unity to it in order to comprehend it. It does not belong to the world and hence cannot be studied scientifically.

Similarly, the idea of cosmos represents the underlying system of order and of law that ground all objects of knowledge. What makes us possible to know the world is this underlying order. The idea of cosmos therefore stands for the idea of a comprehensive world system. It represents the totality of causal sequences. Our faculty of understanding synthesizes the manifold of sense intuition according to causal relation, while the faculty of reason tends to complete the synthesis by reaching an unconditioned unity conceived as the totality of causal sequences. Hence reason postulates an ultimate presupposition of the totality of the causal sequences of phenomena. Kantian scheme criticizes any attempt to study this ultimate presupposition by making it an object. He thus critiques speculative cosmology, which conceives the world as the totality of the causal sequences of phenomena. He argues that, attempting to extend our knowledge of the world, as a totality of phenomena, through synthetic *a priori* propositions leads to antinomies.

The Problem of Antinomies

Antinomies are mutually contradictory propositions, each of which can apparently be proved following the procedure of reason. According to Kant antinomies appear when we apply forms of intuition and the categories of understanding to things that are not experienced. Any speculation concerning the nature of the world leads to antinomies. They arise when we change thoughts into things and hypostasize them. We build an imaginary science on these things. Kant says that there are four antinomies.

As mentioned above, an antinomy consists of mutually contradictory propositions, one of them asserting something and the other denying it. Kant maintains that, both their assertion and denial are the result of illusion. For instance, the first antinomy has a thesis which asserts that “The world has a beginning in time and is also limited as regards space” and an antithesis that asserts, “the world is infinite and has no beginning in time and is not limited to space’. Kant says that both of them can be proved.

In the second antinomy, the statement, “Everything in the world consists of simple part” is the thesis and “There is nothing simple, but everything is composite” is the antithesis. The third antinomy has the statement, “There are two kinds of causality: one according to the laws of nature and the other that of freedom” as the thesis and “There is only causality according to the laws of nature” as the antithesis. In the fourth antinomy “There is an absolutely necessary being belonging to the world either as its part or as its cause” is the thesis and “There is not an absolutely necessary being existing in the world, nor does it exist outside the world as its cause” is the antithesis. As mentioned above, each of these pair consists of two contradictory statements, though both can be proved using logical arguments.

Idea of God

Out of the three ideas of reason, the third one, the transcendental idea of God, is more peculiar and unique, as it is treated as a transcendental ideal. This ideal is necessary because reason seeks an unconditioned unity, which is the final idea in which the thought can rest satisfied. It is conceived as the supreme condition of the possibility of all that is thinkable. Kant argues that, the human mind’s search for more unity and comprehensiveness makes it move toward some higher centre of unification. The mind refers both the self and the world to an all-comprehensive idea, which grounds both the self and the world. This idea is the idea of God.

God therefore, is the idea of the sum total of all possible predicates, containing *a priori* the data for all particular possibilities. It is the idea of the aggregate or sum total of all possible perfections. In God we have the idea of the most perfect Being, which is also the most real Being. It represents the union of the unlimited, pure perfections in one simple being. God therefore, is the grand idea that encompasses everything.

Critiquing Philosophical Theology

Though the idea of God is an extremely important idea of reason and it is presupposed by all acquisition of knowledge, we nevertheless, cannot have synthetic *a priori* propositions concerning its nature or function. Even to know it in the usual sense of the term is problematic. Reason seeks the unconditioned unity of all possible predicates which cannot be found empirically. Here Kant criticizes all the philosophers and theologians who try to prove the existence of such an ideal being. He maintains that reason has to pass beyond the conditioned and hypostatize an individual being who is perfect. But as mentioned above, its existence cannot be proved as no synthetic *a priori* propositions about God are possible.

On the other hand, reason views all cognitions as belonging to a unified and organized system. The architectonic nature of reason enables and prompts it to move from the particular and contingent to the universal. It thus seeks higher and higher levels of generality in order to explain the way things are. But Kant here argues that the ideas of reason have an important theoretical function. His transcendental dialectic thus deals with the regulative use of the ideas of pure reason. He thus argues for some proper immanent use for reason. He also seeks to establish a necessary role for reason's principle of systematic unity. Kant argues that each of the ideas serves as an imaginary point towards which our investigations hypothetically converge. He therefore argues that our metaphysical propensities are grounded in the nature of human reason. The idea of the soul serves to guide our empirical investigations in psychology and the idea of world grounds investigations in physics. They thus represent the systematic unity we aspire in all our empirical studies.

The idea of God, which is the transcendental ideal, grounds the unification of these two branches of natural science into one unified Science. The idea of God, therefore, enables to conceive that every connection in the world happens according to principles of a systematic unity. We can assume that all have arisen from one single all-encompassing being: supreme and all-sufficient cause.

Quiz

1. According to Kant, what are the two aspects that constitute the human mind?
(a) God and Soul (b) Understanding and reason (c) Noumena and phenomena
(d) Knowledge and intuition
2. What is the function of transcendental dialectic?
(a) To critically examine the function of the forms of sensibility (b) To critically examine the function of categories (c) To critically examine the abilities of reason and understanding in providing knowledge of things-in-themselves (d) To critically examine the abilities of reason and understanding in providing knowledge of phenomena.
3. According to Kant, the idea of God is not:
(a) The benevolent creator of the universe (b) The sum total of all possible predicates (c) The transcendental ideal (d) The grand idea that encompasses everything.
4. According to Kant, the ideas of reason are?
(a) Inherent in the nature of reason itself (b) Are not derived empirically (c) Are innate to the mind (d) Are part of phenomena.
5. Which of the following is not true of the ideas of reason?

- (a) They are not given in experience (b) They do not constitute part of the phenomenal reality
(c) We can have no genuine knowledge about them (d) They are given through the ordinary channels of experience.

Answer Key

1. b
2. c
3. a
4. b
5. d

Assignments

1. Explain the functions of the transcendental dialectic.
2. Discuss how the three ideas of reason are derived.

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Chapter 23

Immanuel Kant's Ethical Theory

Key Words: Deontological, hypothetical imperative, categorical imperative, moral law, postulates of morality, universalizability, kingdom of ends, virtue, duty, good will, assertorial, practical reason.

This chapter introduces Immanuel Kant's ethical theory, which adopts a deontological approach. It starts with an examination of the possibility of moral philosophy in the Kantian framework. Two very important concepts in this context are the notion of categorical imperative and the idea of good will. After writing his first *Critique*, which deals with pure reason, Kant addresses the problem of morality, which the latter could not account for. Here instead of pure reason, it is practical reason that becomes relevant.

As mentioned above, Kant's ethical theory adopts a deontological approach which highlights the concept of duty and the idea of universal moral law. This ethical theory has at its centre the idea of categorical imperative, as the ethical command is not hypothetical or conditional, but categorical. Kant discusses various formulations of the categorical imperative. Many concepts like the cosmos, self and God, which pure reason found unable to prove, appear as essential regulative principles and postulates of morality in the context of practical reason. With all these concepts, Kant initiates an ethical theory, which he thought would rationally justify a morality based on duties.

The Ideas of Reason and Ethics

The three "ideas of reason," self, world and God play a vital role in the ethical theory developed by Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant had shown that theoretical reason itself cannot prove their reality. According to him they are not constitutive, but are regulative, as they add systematic unity and coherence to our experience. Since they are related to morals in significant ways, they have immense practical importance.

Kant's Moral Philosophy advocates a deontological moral theory, which opposes making morality conditional to actual circumstances and consequences of actions. What makes an action right according to Kant is not the fact that it leads to good and desirable consequences, but it is performed for the sake of duty. He maintains that the supreme principle of morality is the "categorical imperative," which is an unconditional command. He asserts that the categorical imperative has the nature of an

unconditional moral command or law, which human beings are obliged to follow in their capacity as rational creatures. It is a universal law, which allows no exception. But the central notion of Kant's ethical theory is the idea of good will, which he elaborates with the metaphor of a jewel that shines in its own light.

The Possibility of Morality: Salient Features of Kant's Moral Philosophy

Kant maintains that nature as such is impersonal and nonmoral. Though the world exhibits an order that suggests the possibility of a great and benevolent designer or a God, who provides meaning to everything that happens around us, with the limited human faculties we cannot derive any knowledge about it. This aspect has been demonstrated in the first *Critique*, where he has affirmed the impossibility of metaphysics as a science. Kant agrees with Hume in ridiculing the attempts that sought to find a basis for morality in metaphysical truths.

Since how the world functions is nonmoral, Kant seeks to locate the realm of morals outside the realm of nature. He thus maintains that morals must be independent of how the world functions. Moreover, he holds that there should be an element of unconditionality about morals, as they must be universal and rational. His analysis of theoretical reason sought to locate the preconditions of human knowledge in the very structure of reason itself. Similarly, his moral philosophy intends to discover the *a priori* principles according to which we judge when we make moral judgments from the examination of the structure of practical reason. Hence Kant's approach is profoundly original and unique. As Alastair McIntyre observes:

Kant stands at one of the great dividing points in the history of ethics. For perhaps the majority of later philosophical writers, including many who are self-consciously anti-Kantian, ethics is defined as a subject in Kantian terms. For many who have never heard of philosophy, let alone of Kant, morality is roughly what Kant said it was. [*A Short History of Ethics*]

On the one hand, his theory provides a profound philosophical account of our moral knowledge and ethical judgements by examining their *a priori* structures. Kant pursues to elaborate the idea of a necessary, universal and *a priori* moral knowledge which is manifested in human behavior, when it is ethical. He affirms that it is *a priori* because he does not want to make his theory depend on the actual behaviour of human beings which depends on several conditions. Hence he focuses not the knowledge of "what is," which tells us "how men actually behave", but on "what ought to be" or "how men ought to behave." In other words, Kant seeks to examine the origin of the *a priori* elements in our moral knowledge, by discovering the *a priori* principles according to which we judge when we make moral judgments.

In other words, he seeks to isolate the a priori, and unchanging, elements of morality, by examining what form must a precept have if it is to be recognized as a moral precept. Reflecting the fundamental concerns of his transcendental project and critical approach in philosophy, Kant seeks to know the universal element in moral reasoning by raising the question “what is unconditionally good?” In this context he introduces the notion of categorical imperative and distinguishes it from other forms of imperatives; hypothetical, assertorial etc.

Hypothetical Imperative and Categorical Imperative

In order to demonstrate the unconditional nature of the moral imperative, Kant distinguishes the categorical imperative from other forms of imperatives, primarily from the hypothetical imperative. The latter holds only for certain limited groups of people who, under certain conditions, have certain ends in view. For eg., the statement, “if I wish to score good marks in the examination, then I should study well”, is a hypothetical imperative, as it obviously depends on certain conditions. The assertorial imperatives too are conditional. For eg., the statement, “everybody seeks certain ends like happiness etc. Kant says that the hypothetical rules for attaining them are universally applicable. But they are conditional because they hold only because of the condition that people seek these ends. The rules, which are to be observed in order to attain happiness, are assertorial laws. Kant does not consider such rules as constituting the part of morality, as they are conditional. For him an ethical imperative should be unconditional. The hedonists on the other hand, affirm that all the laws of morality are assertorial. Kant here asserts the importance of the categorical imperative, which holds unconditionally and universally true. He finds that the moral law alone qualifies to be considered as an imperative in this sense. The moral law is conceived as absolute, a priori, rational and as based on the idea of Good Will. There are no ifs and buts when it is applied. It does not depend on any of our purposes or goals and in this sense Kant opposes all forms of teleological and consequentialist ethical theories that bind ethics to external conditions.

The idea of good will

To answer the question, “what is unconditionally good?” Kant examines the idea of good will. He says that there is nothing in the world or even out of it that can be called good without qualification except a good will. Things, which are intrinsically good, are good even if they exist all alone.

Kant claims that, everything else is good only in relation to the Good Will, which is the ultimate criterion that determines the moral worth of an action. All other things that are usually considered as good like health, wealth, gifts of fortune, talents, intellect etc., are good only insofar as they are used well or used by a good will. Kant here seems to be focusing on the agent's will and his motives and intentions. He

affirms that the good will is always unconditionally good, irrespective of the consequences of the action it prompts the agent to perform.

One important feature of Kant's ethical theory in general and his idea of the good will is their affinity with our ordinary moral reasoning. We all are familiar with these ideas which Kant makes more explicit by exposing its structure with a profound philosophical analysis. He claims that he is only making explicit a truth, which is implicitly present in ordinary moral knowledge.

As mentioned above, according to Kant a good will is itself an intrinsically good whole and it is good even when it exists quite alone. Hence the question "what makes good will good?" is not very easy to answer. Kant makes the "unconditionality" as a prerequisite in his conception of moral law and good will. Therefore, he opposes consequentialism that makes the results to which an action leads as the central element in assessing its moral worth. According to him, this would make good will hypothetical or assertorial.

Kant announces that the moral law is categorical and he asserts its absolute authority. He claims that, what makes willing right is that it must be based on a rational principle. According to him the moral law is a law of reason. He treats man as fundamentally a rational being and therefore, to obey the dictates of reason is not only desirable, but is categorical. Moreover, the universe where man finds himself is also constructed on rational principles. Hence the ultimate criterion that makes an action right must be its performance in reverence to the law of reason. In other words, it must be performed for the sake of duty. This is the function of practical reason according to Kant.

Practical reason affirms that, only rational actions are morally right and therefore, in order to prove that an action is right we have to prove that it is rational. Kant specifically affirms that no other criterion or contingent factor like emotions, inclinations, circumstances etc., should be referred to while assessing the moral worth of an action. This condition of rational accordance needs to be further elaborated. According to Kant, a right action must be universally right. It must be same for every individual, irrespective of tastes, inclinations or circumstances. It should be definitely in accordance with duty. But an action in accordance with duty need not necessarily be a morally right action. Here Kant makes a distinction between actions which are **in accordance with duty** and actions which are **done for the sake of duty**. The former are performed for the achievement of certain goals and certain ends, although they might confirm to the dictates of reason and duty. For instance, I may spend a lot of money for helping the needy fellow human beings, which is my duty as a human being. But I do this not for the sake of duty, but for gaining recognition and fame in the society. Such an action, although it is in accordance with duty, would not qualify to be called as morally right according to Kant's criteria, as they

are not unconditionally right or good. Such actions cannot claim moral worth. Kant affirms that moral actions are actions that are performed for the sake of duty. He insists that performance of duty is unconditional: **Duty for the sake of duty**.

In other words, morally good actions are performed by an agent with the knowledge that it was dutiful and not just because he was inclined towards performing such actions or he performed them desiring certain results or preventing certain undesirable consequences of not honouring duty. This is a very interesting aspect of Kant's moral theory and it brings out his emphasis on reason. Kant is aware that good inclination or altruism may lead one to be good and to do one's duty. Some people are by nature inclined to do good and perform their duty without any reference to consequences. Such actions are said to be springing from inclination. But Kant's rational moral theory does not accept such actions as morally worthy. Here there is an apparent contrast between duty and inclination.

Kant argues that our inclinations are determined by our physical and psychological nature and he says that we cannot choose them. He stresses on the aspect of choice and affirms that our choices should be rational. Since human beings are rational creatures, the obedience to a rational and universal law is unconditionally binding.

But, the reason which Kant mentions here is not the theoretical reason which he analysed in his first *Critique*—the reason that constitutes the object given in intuition—but is **Practical or Moral Reason** that is concerned with the production of moral choices or decisions in accordance with the law which proceeds from itself. It is necessarily directed towards a choice in accordance with the moral law that is universal. Kant argues that practical reason influences the will as it moves the latter by identifying itself with it and by means of the moral imperative it makes the will a rational power. The practical reason or rational will is therefore the foundation of the moral law.

Kant's idea of moral duty can be elaborated in this context. According to him, duty is the necessity of acting out of reverence for the universal moral law, which admits of no exceptions. The distinction between “actions in accordance with duty” and “actions for the sake of duty” becomes more apparent here. In order to perform actions for the sake of duty one has to rationally comprehend what is the dutiful action on a particular context. Since it is unconditional, it must be performed in reverence to the universal moral command, which alone is the right choice. It is to “act in accordance with the idea of law”, which rational beings alone are capable of.

The moral law is grounded in practical reason, which means that it is based on a principle on which all men would act if they were purely rational moral agents. To understand this clearly let us

examine what actually happens when we make moral choices in our actual life. We make a choice and act on the basis of a maxim, which is a subjective principle of volition. It is this maxim which determines his decisions. But this subjective principle of volition need not be in agreement with the universal moral law and for Kant actions are morally worthy only if they are performed out of reverence for the law. The moral law is presented as a categorical imperative and the practical reason commands its performance which we who are rational creatures are obliged to honour. This acting out of reverence for law is duty and in the performance of duty one is expected to overcome all other factors like passions, inclinations and desires that are in conflict with the moral command.

On the one hand, our actions are based on maxims that are subjective principle of volition and on the other hand to be morally right they have to be in accordance with the idea of law. In other words, for the will to be morally good, we should will that our maxims, should become universal laws and they have to be in accordance with the moral law. And if the actions governed by the maxim obey the universal moral law, then it will have moral worth. Such actions are then performed “for the sake of duty” by rational creatures, as only rational creatures can consciously perform actions for the sake of duty.

Here Kant encounters a problem. There could be a discrepancy between the objective principles of morality and a man's maxims or subjective principles of volition. Consequently, the objective principles of morality need not always govern our actions. We sometimes act on maxims or subjective principles of volition which are incompatible with the objective principles of morality. In other words, the will does not necessarily follow the dictate of reason. This problem has led him to think of formulating, what is the core of his moral philosophy; the categorical imperative.

Formulating the Categorical Imperative

In the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* Kant formulates the categorical imperative in three different ways. The first form of the categorical imperative is the universal law formulation. It states the following:

Universal Law formulation

Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law

This first formulation can be further elaborated in two ways, emphasizing the universality aspect.

1. Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law
2. Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature

Here the test of the rightness of an action consists in seeing whether we are prepared to ensure that everybody else should adopt the rule, on which we perform the action, as our own rule of action. Hence it stresses on avoiding inconsistencies. It is logically inconsistent to adopt a moral principle for ourselves and to refuse to adopt that same principle for other people. We should also be able to universalize the principle. For example, it is inconsistent to refuse to repay borrowed money, as the institution of money-lending could not go on if everybody refused to pay his debts.

The second formulation highlights the importance of considering the humanity as end in itself. It states that:

Humanity as End in Itself formulation

Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.

This formulation summons to treat every rational being including oneself, always as an end, and never as a mere means. In other words, it stresses that we should not use a rational being as a mere means, as though he had no value in himself except as a means to my subjective end. This principle is applicable for oneself as well as for others. For example, in suicide, one uses oneself, a person, as a mere means to the end, which is the maintenance of tolerable conditions up to the end of life. Similarly, the man who makes a promise to another one to get his things done, but does not keep it, makes the other person a means.

The assumption behind this is the notion of the kingdom of ends. He assumes the existence of a kingdom of the systematic union of rational beings through common laws. Kant conceives every rational being as both member and sovereign in this kingdom of ends. He is a member because, although giving laws, he is also subject to them. He is a sovereign because, while legislating, he is not subject to the will of any other, but only to his own rational self.

The Postulates of Practical Reason

The postulates of morality are ideas that transcend the limitations of reason in its theoretical use, as the latter operates only in the phenomenal domain of reality. The postulates of morality are therefore, postulates of reason in its practical or moral use.

For example, the idea of freedom, according to Kant is a practical necessity. He maintains that it is not possible to arrive at any theoretical proof for freedom. Nor can we disprove freedom. Kant says that the condition of the possibility of a categorical imperative is to be found in the idea of freedom, as without freedom we cannot act morally, which is equivalent to acting for the sake of duty. Kant famously states that “an ought presupposes a can”. According to him, moral obligation presupposes that we have the freedom to obey or disobey the law and we can make universal laws only if we are free. In other words, practical reason must regard itself as free and the concept of categorical imperative presupposes the idea of freedom.

The second postulate of morality is immortality, which Kant establishes in an indirect manner. He argues that the moral law commands us to pursue virtue. According to him, virtue consists in being in complete accordance of will and feeling with the moral law. Such a complete accordance or perfection is impossible to achieve in the span of one single life time. The perfect good must be realized in the form of an indefinite, unending progress towards the ideal. This naturally presupposes the unending duration of the existence of the same individual. This is immortality of the soul, which is a postulate of the pure practical reason. According to Kant, this is not demonstrable by reason in its theoretical use. But at the same time, we cannot deny its practical value, as to deny immortality is to deny moral law.

The third postulate is the existence of God. Here again Kant refers to the idea of preconditions. He reminds us that the concept of moral law demands that virtue and happiness are necessarily connected *a priori* and are not based on actual situations and conditions. Happiness is the state of a rational being in the world with whom in the totality of his existence everything goes according to his wish and will. It envisages a harmony of physical nature with man's wish and will. This condition does not happen without the possibility of a God who oversees such connections and harmony. It presupposes an *a priori* synthetic connection between virtue and happiness, so that happiness will follow and be proportioned to virtue. The possibility of such an *a priori* connection demands that we must postulate the existence of a cause of the whole of nature who is God. Therefore, God is the ground of the connection of happiness with morality. God, according to Kant, apportions happiness to morality according to the conception of law. Happiness is to be apportioned to morality. Kant conceives God as omniscient and omnipotent. He maintains that God is the cause of nature and is capable of bringing into existence a world in which happiness is exactly proportioned to virtue.

All the three postulates of morality proceed from the principle of morality, which is a law. Kant maintains that these postulates, though have no role to play in pure reason, have immense practical value. They extend our knowledge from a practical point of view and suggest us what ought to be done. Kant develops his deontological ethics by rejecting the consequentialist approaches in ethics, with the help of these postulates, with the idea of a

good will and with the notion of categorical imperative. Kant's objective was to develop an ethical theory and ground it on human reason. Reflecting the spirit of the transcendental approach, Kant looks for the *a priori* conditions that make an action unconditionally good.

But the stress on such *a priori* conditions raises certain difficulties. It makes his ethical theory too formalistic and abstract, which ultimately made it difficult to deal with choices made in practical life. In our day to day life, we encounter highly complex situations where making the right ethical choice is an extremely difficult task. Kant's theory demands that ethical choices can be made independent of the situations and contexts where we encounter them. Choices are right or wrong *a priori*.

Again, Kant's idea of practical reason demands that the postulates of morality cannot be proved. One may wonder in what sense they are rational? Kant's idea of reason suggests that the pure or theoretical reason is different from practical reason. Therefore, Kant's conception of enlightenment rationality envisages a fragmentation of the human rational faculty. This may further lead to a fragmentation of the human self and also the society, a rift which threatens the very project of modernity.

Quiz

1. According to Kant, the ideas of reason?
(a) Are proved by theoretical reason (b) Are constitutive and regulative (c) Make our experience possible (d) Are related to pure reason.
2. According to Kant, what makes an action right?
(a) It leads to good and desirable consequences (b) It is in accordance with the duty of the person who performed it (c) It is performed for the sake of duty (d) The performer of the action is a virtuous individual.
3. Which of the following is not true according to Kant?
(a) Morals are independent of how the world functions (b) Morals are unconditionally universal and rational (c) How the world functions is nonmoral (d) The basis of morals are in metaphysical truths.
4. The first form of the categorical imperative emphasizes:
(a) Avoiding inconsistencies (b) Treating rational beings as ends (c) Kingdom of ends (d) Desirable consequences.
5. Which among the following statements is not related to Kant's notion of freedom?
[a] Without freedom we cannot act morally [b] We are condemned to be free [c] We are free to do anything [d] Human freedom is a postulate of morality.
6. Which of the following statements are true of Kant?
[i] Everything in the world goes in according to the wish and will of God.
[ii] There is an *a priori* synthetic connection between virtue and happiness.
[iii] God apportions happiness to morality according to the conception of law.

[iv] Happiness and sorrows are rewards and punishments from God.

(a) [i], [ii] and [iii] (b) [i] and [ii] (c) [ii] and [iii] (d) All the four.

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [c]
3. [d]
4. [a]
5. [c]
6. [c]

Assignments

1. Explain the concept of the postulates of morality.
2. Discuss the notion of categorical imperative and its different formulations.

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Chapter 24

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel:

The Concepts of Being, Non-being and Becoming

Key Words: Romanticism, *Geist*, Spirit, absolute, immediacy, teleological causality, noumena, dialectical method, contradictions, thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis, negation, preservation, elevation.

Introduction

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was born on August 27th, 1770 in Stuttgart, Germany. After school education, he went to Tübingen to study philosophy and theology and it was during this period he acquainted with the great poet Hölderlin and the philosopher Schelling. Under their influence he started reading the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and J. G. Fichte. Bertrand Russell observes that Hegel was the culmination of the movement in German philosophy that started from Kant, as although he often criticized Kant, his system could never have arisen if Kant's had not existed.

Russell further says that, Hegel's philosophy is very difficult and he is the hardest to understand of all the great philosophers. Hegel published his first major work, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807. Apart from French Rationalism, British Empiricism and Kant's transcendental philosophy, he was influenced by the outlook and approaches of Romanticism. It was probably under the influence of the latter Hegel envisages formulating a philosophical theory that includes all and will reach to infinity. He intends to develop a totalizing philosophy that comprehends all reality and incorporates all knowledge; a philosophy that accounts for all human experience. Hegel wants to synthesize the wisdom present in science, history, religion, politics, art and literature in his system.

Under the influence of Romanticism Hegel construed a notion of reality that is essentially spiritual. This opposes the widely held view of the enlightenment philosophy which conceived reality as material. The Newtonian conception of nature as a mechanical world is given up and instead he advocated an idea of nature where the latter is treated as an essential spiritual phenomenon.

Important Features of Hegelian Philosophy

The central idea of Hegel's philosophy is “only the whole is real.” He thus introduces a concept of the *Geist* or Spirit as a totalizing central concept that unifies everything. He views every partial fact in isolation as essentially incomplete and as an artificial abstraction, which will gain validity only when brought into connection with the whole. He thus attempts to avoid immediacy, the view which holds that something can be itself independently of its relations to anything else. Such an approach, according to Hegel, results in many unwarranted philosophical perplexities and problems, which can be resolved only by emphasizing the importance of highlighting the perspective of the whole. Russell observes that under the spell of mysticism, which Hegel held during his formative years, he opposes separateness and seeks to demonstrate that nothing exists independently of relationships. Reality, affirms Hegel, is the whole and the self-subsistence of finite things is an illusion. In this propensity to see everything as a homogeneous whole, Russell sees the influence of mysticism.

Hegel's Concept of Reality

Like Spinoza, who too has emphasized the essential homogeneous nature of the ultimate reality, which is Substance or God, for Hegel too reality, which is the whole, is homogeneous. But unlike Spinoza's Substance Hegel's absolute is a complex system comparable to an organism. Therefore, unlike Spinoza he maintains that separate things are not illusory, as each has a greater or lesser degree of reality. The reality of separate things consists in them being an aspect of the whole, which is the Absolute.

Again, Hegel holds that the reality is governed by the principle of teleological causality and not by mechanical efficient causality. Hence, the meaning of each stage is realized in the whole, which is a rational process. He thus identifies the Spirit with activity. The influence of Aristotle is visible in this teleological conception. We shall explore this aspect in detail in the next chapter. What is important in the present context is the revision he proposes in the conception of rationality. Kant, as we have seen earlier, draws certain necessary limits to reason and based on this insight, separates the noumena from phenomena. What is subjected to rational comprehension is the element of reality that is given through the cooperation of sensibility and understanding.

Contrary to this, the absolute, which is the whole, is like an organism that is rational, purposive and with full of meaning. Hegel realizes that the Kantian approach is not suitable to know such a reality and his conception of rationality is insufficient in knowing the process. Kant maintains that the ego or mind is the condition of the possibility of things appearing to

the subject. An account of the ego in Kantian philosophy is nothing but an abstract account of the forms of thought or categories of understanding. Reason is a faculty of the soul or ego constituted of a combination of principles, forms, or rules according to which we think. He thus separates the mind from the world. Or in other words, the forms of thought are separated from what they are forms of. Kant imagines that there is a gap between mind and world or the noumena and phenomena. According to him, the noumena or things in themselves can never be known. He also warns us about the antinomies we may end up with in our thinking when we try to comprehend things in themselves with the employment of sensibility and understanding.

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* attempts to give an alternate account of this relationship and show how that gap can be bridged. Here he proposes to go beyond Kant. There are certain fundamental differences between their respective approaches to philosophy. While Kant was significantly influenced by the physical sciences, Hegel adopts the approach of a historian. For Kant thinking is confined to the scientific level and for Hegel it is an activity of spirit or reason and hence is not simply confined to the scientific level. Hegel thus argues that the so-called inevitable contradictions in thinking, which Kant envisaged, could be overcome and we can rise above contradictions to their synthesis.

Hegel views reason as the law according to which being is produced, constituted and unfolded. It is both a subjective faculty and an objective reality. He maintains that the categories of thinking are not just subjective elements of our thinking. They are also modes of being of the things themselves. They are not empty frames, which receive their contents from without but are substantial forms that give themselves their own content. They are both the forms, which mould my thought and the stages of eternal creation. In this respect, Hegel opposes Kant's idea of pure concepts. He opposes Kant's approach that limits the number of concepts and also limits these categories to the use in sensory experience. The root problem in Kant's enlightenment conception lies in his limiting the knowledge gained by the categories to the status of mere appearance. Hegel thus opposes the deduction of categories in terms of empirical enumeration of pure concepts.

There are certain fundamental ways in which Hegel's view of the categories of thinking differs from that of Kant's. For Kant the categories are separate from each other, though they are intimately interconnected. He thus attempts an *a priori* deduction of the categories by means of an empirical enumeration of pure concepts. On the other hand, Hegel maintains that the categories are transformations of one and the same fundamental category,

which is the idea of being. Unlike in Kant they are not merely empirical enumeration but are known through real deduction. Nevertheless, like Kant, Hegel too holds that the categories have some supremacy over sense impressions. He thus proposes to further build upon Kant by combining the idea of critical philosophy with the totalizing approach of Romanticism. He thus extends the use of rational concepts in order to understand the vast variety of experience and knowledge in a multiplicity of domains like psychology, religion, history, culture, literature and art.

Hegel thus proposes the construction of a new theory of reality and a new metaphysics that intends to bring the vast reaches of the human spirit into unification in a single theory. He envisages bringing together the totality of concepts used in the vast stretches of all knowledge, all the arts and sciences, religion, political thought and history. The concept of the Absolute Spirit or the *Geist*, which is rational, encompasses all these aspects of reality.

Geist is the German word, which means spirit, mind or soul. According to Hegel, the *Geist* is both rational and rationally comprehensible. Its logical structure is manifested in natural sciences and in historical progress. With such an all-encompassing concept, Hegel seeks to demonstrate that, thought and the matter of thought are not essentially distinct or separate. He emphasizes that the different forms of thought arise historically through the interaction of subject and object. The whole of reality which includes nature, humanity, history etc., is shaped by the *Geist*, mind or spirit. It manifests through self-consciousness or self-articulation in these human endeavours. In all these diverse fields of human endeavours like psychology, history, religion, drama, art, and philosophy, we find only but the manifestations of the self-consciousness of *Geist*. In this context Hegel proclaims that the real is rational and the rational is real.

Since this Absolute Spirit encompasses everything, it is God and also the ultimate reality. It thus is a complex totality of rational concepts constituting absolute spirit or God. This totality of thought is absolute and infinite unlike the finite minds of humans. Hegel calls the *Geist* the objective mind. The rest of Hegel's philosophy can be logically deduced from this notion of rational Spirit, which is a totality of rational concepts, thoughts and minds. As pointed out by Alfred Weber, according to Hegel, the common source of the ego and of nature does not transcend reality. On the other hand, it is immanent in it. Mind and nature are not mere aspects of the absolute. As Russell says, they are not like a screen, behind which an indifferent and lifeless God lies concealed. Nor is the absolute the principle of nature and of

mind, but is itself successively nature and mind. This succession, this process, this perpetual generation of things, is the absolute itself. [*History of Philosophy*]. The absolute is not immovable, but active.

Hegel's absolute idealism thus presents a very unique account of reality where the latter is conceived as rational and as a conceptual totality and an integrated and total structure of conceptual truths. Hegel maintains that the totality of conceptual truths reveals itself in all areas of human experience and knowledge. The domain of reality therefore, includes all the rational realms as the vast structure of rational concepts that includes all possible areas.

But the absolute Spirit is not a mere abstract category of thought. Nor is it a formal or ideal archetype as Plato conceives reality. Hegel maintains that it is not different from what is existent. He asserts that the rational is the existent object more deeply understood. It is the deeper understanding of the vast realms of physical and organic nature and society. In this sense it is not independent or transcendental, apart from the concrete world. Instead, it constitutes the rational core of the world of things.

From these assumptions, Hegel derives his all-inclusive idealism. Opposing Kant he argues that since reality is rational, it is knowable, as its rational structures are knowable. The absolute mind is a unity-in-diversity and it incorporates all differences. The Absolute Reality manifests itself to us in ordinary experience, in logic and natural science, in psychology, politics and history, in painting, poetry, and architecture, and in religion and philosophy.

As mentioned above, the absolute being is the common root of the categories or pure concepts. There are certain difficulties in rationally comprehending this concept, as it is the emptiest and at the same time the most comprehensive reality. It is the most abstract and the most real, the most elementary and the most exalted notion. Since it encompasses everything, all our concepts express modes of being, and are transformations of the idea of being. To repeat, it is everything and hence involves everything. Therefore, it is the most universal being. Logically speaking, this absolute being, which is absolutely infinite and is "everything", cannot be any specific "thing", as any specific thing is essentially a limited and finite entity. The question Hegel needs to answer is; how does being, which is everything, become anything else? He seeks to know in virtue of what principle or inner force is it modified? How does Being which is complete and static initiate movement so that it can become something?

In other words, being is the most universal notion, and hence the poorest and emptiest, the absolute Spirit seems to be “no specific entity” or “no thing”. To be something it needs to be determined as a thing and finite. But the absolute Spirit by definition is indeterminate and infinite. Every determination is a limitation and the Spirit is an absolutely unlimited being. But being without any determination is non-being, or being pure and simple is equal to non-being. The absolute, according to Hegel, is both being and non-being and hence, paradoxically, both itself and its opposite. Since it is infinite and complete in itself, it should be an immovable and barren thing. It cannot be moving, because, there is no “place” or “space” which is devoid of it. Hence it is nothing or non-being.

There is therefore, a fundamental contradiction in the conception of being, which Hegel says can be overcome if we really understand the implications of such a contradiction, where being is both itself and its opposite. This contradiction between being and non-being is resolved in the notion of becoming, or development. He argues that, because being is both it becomes something. The contradiction present in its conceptualization as a being, results in the dynamism that makes the being an eternal process. Becoming is both being and non-being, as both are contained and reconciled in it. As a result of this opposition of being and non-being there arises a synthesis, which incorporates both and advances further. But this again will result in the assertion of being, which generates its contradiction. This new contradiction that results from the process of becoming is further resolved by a new synthesis, and so on, until we reach the absolute idea.

Hegel thus explains the concept of reality with an explication of the process of becoming where contradictions are continuously encountered, resolved and synthesized. Each contradiction is reconciled in a unity or a synthesis. This synthesis arrived is contradicted further and then synthesized in another unity. Contradictions and unities appear one after another in the process of development until they are all resolved in the final unity of the absolute idea.

Hegelian system thus conceives contradictions, not as hindrances or as absolutes. Hegel argues that contradictions exist not only in thought, but also in the things themselves. They form the very nature of reality. Hence Hegel does not view the Kantian antinomies as problematic. Instead, they are understood as natural as they lie in the nature of reason and in reality. The contradiction found in the idea of being is resolved in the notion of becoming. Hegel says that, in the process of becoming, being determines itself. With an exposition of this process where contradictions are encountered and synthesized, Hegel brings out the

dialectical element in thought and reality. He affirms that this process and the immanent dialectical element will also explain the process of historical development. Hegel attempts to expose the dialectic that is manifest in every phenomena; natural, organic, political and historical. He says that it constitutes the moving soul of scientific progress. He conceives contradictions as the motive force of all reality and the principle of all movement and of all activity we find in reality.

Hegel also tells us how to deal with the contradictions. Opposing the traditional apprehensions about them, Hegel holds that they are not unthinkable. They constitute the root of all life and movement. Everything tends to change or pass into its opposites and without contradictions everything would be dead existence, static externality. This insight further suggests that no single concept represents the whole truth. Therefore, truth is the whole. All individual concepts are partial truths. Reality as a whole consists of oppositions and contradictions and their eventual overcoming. Nature does not stop at contradictions, but overcomes it. All oppositions are resolved in the absolute. Hegel holds that Truth like rational reality is a living process, as it is constituted by the entire system of concepts. He argues that reason can capture this moving reality with the application of the method of dialectic.

The Dialectical Method

Hegel categorically asserts that reason is not a static faculty, but is the product of our social heritage, the historical development of our social group. It encounters contradictions and proceeds by synthesizing them in the process. Dialectical thinking is a process that seeks to do justice to the moving, living, organic existence.

The dialectic is not Hegel's invention. It is an old philosophical concept, which we find present since the days of the ancient Greek philosophy. The ancient Greek thought had deliberated upon the theory of four elements, where that have understood reality as composed of earth and air, and also fire and water, the pairs, which are in constant opposition. Nature is a process where these oppositions coexist and cooperate, to bring out higher forms of manifestations. It was Socrates who developed this as a method of philosophizing where he used it in his debates and dialogues with others. He employed it in his arguments in order to make the opponent contradict himself.

Hegel presents a unique perspective about the dialectic process, where contradictions are encountered and synthesized in order to rise above to a higher form of conceptual reality.

Since all individual concepts represent only a finite and limited perspective, every concept we frame has limitations, and hence will pass over into its opposite. It thus generates its own opposition and negation. Hegel argues that this is a process that consists of three stages, or moments; thesis, antithesis and synthesis. They are the three moments of the dialectic. The dialectic process begins by proposing a thesis. From there it moves to a second stage which negates, opposes, or contradicts the first and thus initiating an antithesis. This opposition is overcome by a third stage in which the opposing stages are synthesized. In synthesis a new concept emerges as a higher truth which transcends them.

The synthesis here has three functions. First, it cancels the conflict between thesis and antithesis. Second, it preserves or retains the element of truth that was present within the thesis and antithesis. Finally, it transcends the opposition between them by sublimating the conflict into a higher truth. This process, therefore, involves negation, preservation and elevation. A thesis that is initiated is negated. For example, in Astronomy, in its very assertion itself, Ptolemy's geocentric view is negated, as it represents only a single and finite perspective. Let us call it $\sim(\text{Ptolemy})$. The creative conflict between (Ptolemy) and $\sim(\text{Ptolemy})$ is synthesized in the helio-centric view proposed by Copernicus. Here the Copernican view is the synthesis and it preserves both the thesis and antithesis. In other words, in the Copernican view, Ptolemy is preserved, in terms of being what made the former possible. Again, the synthesis will also elevate, as the new account is superior to both the thesis and the antithesis.

Quiz

1. What is the central idea of Hegel's philosophy?
(a) Reality is both material and spiritual (b) Each element in reality has an independent meaning (c) Only the whole is real (d) Reality is material.
2. The view which holds that "something can be itself independently of its relations to anything else", is known as?
(a) Absolute idealism (b) Immediacy (c) Subjective idealism (d) Pluralism.
3. What is not true of the Hegelian absolute Spirit?
(a) It is rational (b) It is purposive (c) It is static (d) It is with full of meaning
4. Which of the following statements is not true of Hegel?
(a) His thinking is confined to the scientific level (b) He adopts the approach of a historian (c) Conceived thinking as an activity of spirit or reason (d) Thinking is not simply confined to the scientific level

5. According to Hegel, the categories of thinking are?
(a) Subjective elements of our thinking (b) Modes of being (c) Abstract empty frames (d) Pure concepts.

Answer Key:

1. [c]
2. [b]
3. [d]
4. [a]
5. [b]

Assignments

1. Explain the concept of Absolute spirit.
2. Describe the process of dialectic.

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Chapter 25

Hegel's Absolute Idealism and the Phenomenology of Spirit

Key Words: Absolute idealism, contradictions, antinomies, Spirit, Absolute, absolute idealism, teleological causality, objective mind, universal mind, phenomenology of mind, consciousness, self-consciousness, reason.

Hegel's absolute idealism tries to arrive at an all-encompassing theory to bridge the finite with the infinite. He proclaims that, only the whole is real and hence all particular facts and concepts are incomplete and only partially true. Hegel advances a very interesting theory, which considers contradictions as natural. This is contrary to the traditional philosophical views, which considered contradictions as problematic, and something they need to be necessarily avoided. Hegel's new way of thinking suggests that we can take the irrational approach of contradicting ourselves. He thus proposes to resolve the problem of antinomies exposed by the Kantian framework. Kant has shown that pure reason encounters antinomies when it tries to prove things, which are not given to us through the forms of sensibility and the conceptual categories. We thus encounter certain irresolvable contradictions. Kant suggests that to avoid this situation we should keep away from such ventures. He declares the impossibility of metaphysics as a science based on this scenario.

Hegel on the other hand approaches reason from a different perspective. He was not prepared to accept the traditional view about the nature of reason, where the latter is conceived as a static faculty. His idealistic view states that cosmic history consists in the life story of spirit or *Geist*, which is the *absolute*. He conceived the *Geist* as rational and hence essentially dynamic. Hegel's idealism asserts that the absolute encompasses everything. In Hegel's own words, "everything that from eternity has happened in heaven and earth, the life of God and all the deeds of time are simply the struggles of Spirit to know itself and to find itself." This Spirit is universal and is concrete within itself. As mentioned above the Spirit is a process and hence is dynamic and its

intelligent comprehension of itself is at the same time the progression of the total evolving reality.

Hegel divides philosophy into three broad categories: logic, naturphilosophy and the philosophy of the *Geist*. Logic consists of the account of the forms of thought, naturphilosophie deals with the natural sciences, as the manifestation of the forms of thought in the objective world and philosophy of *Geist* deals with the manifestation of the forms of thought in society. We can see that all the three sections deal with forms of thought and the fundamental unity of the rational forms. Hegel affirms that everything coincides in the Absolute.

The Absolute is conceived by Hegel as the ultimately real, which is the whole process that encompasses, the subjective and the objective, internal and external and all the three dimensions of time. It is a complex organic system constituted of individual separate things that are real. The reality of these separate things consists in them being an aspect of the whole. In this sense, the absolute incorporates both the finite and the infinite and it bridges the finite with the infinite.

Hegel is careful in providing an account of the *Geist*. It is not the reality that appears before us. He thus categorizes the phenomena that appears before us as inferior or even not completely real, although his all-encompassing theory is not prepared to conceive the appearances as completely unreal. But he opposes the prevailing model of cognition advocated by the enlightenment rationality. Hegel proposes to turn inward to our understanding to arrive at the true source of philosophical knowledge. In this process of philosophical contemplation, one may encounter contradictions, as one is focusing solely on understanding. Hegel argues that we have to allow contradictions to take place and reconcile them. We have to allow the process to progress and manifest itself in thinking and in reality.

Here the concept of reality advocated by Hegel is unique and different. He argues that it is governed by the principle of teleological causality and not mechanical efficient causality. He affirms that, in this process, the meaning of each stage is realized in the whole, which is rational. Hegel thus suggests a revision of the conception of rationality, particularly the sort of which was

advocated by Kant and many other enlightenment thinkers. He endeavours to overcome the Kantian separation of the noumena and phenomena and finite and infinite that ultimately draws limits to rational thinking.

The most important feature of this idealism is the conception of the Spirit as activity. In this conception, Hegel is visibly influenced by Aristotle and proposes a principle of teleological causality. In Aristotle's philosophy we find an identification of the fully substantial being with spirit, which in its essence is activity. Aristotle explains the process of evolution with the help of the concepts of potentiality and actuality and also with the idea of the principle of causation that functions everywhere in terms of the four principles; formal, material, efficient and final causes. Accordingly, in this teleological conception, things have necessary meanings and every process that happens in the world are rational, purposive and with full of meaning.

In Aristotle's framework, since reality is rational we can understand it. It is therefore reflected in a unity of logic and metaphysics. According to the teleological process, reality, world, thought and reason are not static, but are dynamic and they move and evolve. The changes are not arbitrary but meaningful and hence all changes are part of the evolutionary process, which is meaningful and teleological. In the process of evolution, something that is undeveloped, undifferentiated, homogeneous, and hence abstract, develops, differentiates, splits up, and assumes many different forms.

The recognition of such diversity and differences is essential for adopting a teleological approach. The possibility of these different finite forms contradicting each other is not ruled out. But Hegel argues that these finite forms are finally unified. The absolute is thus a unity in diversity. Hegel declares that the Real is Rational and rational is Real. According to him, the absolute spirit, or God, is the ultimate reality, which is the *Geist* or objective mind. Therefore, reality is a complex totality of rational concepts constituting absolute spirit.

Hegel maintains that, contrary to the finite minds of humans, which are nothing, but manifestations of the universal, objective mind, this totality of thought is absolute and infinite. He thus conceives reality, which is rational as

the conceptual totality and an integrated and total structure of conceptual truths.

This rational Absolute or the universal mind, which constitutes the totality of conceptual truths, reveals itself in all areas of human experience and knowledge. It includes everything. Since it is rational, it includes the vast structure of rational concepts that is present in all areas. Hegel maintains that, though the Absolute is infinite and universal, it is not different from what is existent. He thus affirms that the rational is the existent object more deeply understood. It encompasses the deeper understanding of the vast realms of physical and organic nature and society. The rational concepts are not independent or transcendental, apart from the concrete world; instead, they constitute the rational core of the world of things.

As discussed in the previous chapter, contrary to Kant, who held that the noumena or the real is unknowable, Hegel holds that reality is knowable, since its rational structures are knowable. We have also seen how this process happens and how is it known by employing the dialectic method. Hegel argues that, owing to its comprehensiveness, all our concepts express modes of being, and are transformations of the idea of being. Hence in the absolute, which is a process, every newly evolving stage contains all the preceding stages and foreshadows all the future ones. Every finite stage is both a product and a prophecy. We have examined in the previous chapter how the lower forms are not only negated in the higher forms but also are preserved. The lower forms were carried over and sublated in the higher.

As indicated above, ends or purposes are realized in the process of evolution. Hegel says that, the purposes of universal reason are realized in the process. According to him, the truth lies in the whole, which is the truth of the organism. The absolute is a spiritual and logical process of evolution and in order to comprehend reality, we need to experience this process in ourselves by reproducing the rational necessity in all thought and in reality in our thinking by the dialectic. Thinking, like reality itself, evolves rationally, moves logically, genetically and dialectically. Hegel further maintains that the absolute or *Geist* is the creative logos or reason and it contains in it the entire logical-

dialectical process which unfolds itself in a world. All the laws of its evolution are outlined in the Absolute and hence find expression in the form of objective existence.

Hegel's conception of God calls our attention once again in this context. Contrary to the predominant view held by enlightenment reason, Hegel does not conceive God as separate from the world. On the other hand, God is the living and moving reason of the world. God reveals himself in the world, in nature and in history. According to him, nature and history are necessary stages in the evolution of God into self-consciousness. At the same time, Hegel is not prepared to accept a complete absorption of the world into God. He rather maintains that, God cannot be without creating a world and without knowing himself in his other in the dialectic.

The absolute is therefore, a unity in opposition, as it includes the world, God and the human mind. The usual theological hierarchy where man is placed below God is therefore, not found in Hegel in its strict form. He holds that the human mind is not a mere inferior dependent entity. According to him the divine Idea is enriched by its self-expressions in nature and history. Through them it rises to self-consciousness. Hegel describes this process of evolution, a phenomenon where the absolute thinks itself in its object. It comes to know its own essence only in evolution and this happens only in man. It is only in the human mind's thinking process which is dialectical the absolute realizes its essence.

Hegel thus interestingly maintains that in all aspects of human life; in nature itself, in individuals, human institutions, history, law, morality, custom, ethical observances of human beings, we find nothing but the expression of universal reason. He says that, in all such instance the universal spirit realizes its purpose in a rational dialectical movement. The culmination point of this process is the absolute mind. It is therefore, the supreme stage in the evolution of the logical idea. This absolute mind involves everything. The phenomenology of Spirit, which is an attempt to outline the biography of the spirit of humanity will explain this further.

The Phenomenology of Spirit

The phenomenology of spirit outlines the evolution of the human spirit from lesser stages of existence and realization to higher and ultimately to the highest stage. The human mind, according to Hegel, undergoes this process in its evolution to its highest potential and he attempts to trace it. This is very important in Hegelian philosophy, because according to him, it is only in the human mind the absolute Spirit comes to know its own essence in evolution. In a sense it is a description of the history of consciousness.

Phenomenology is a science of consciousness that tries to study the mind in relation to external or internal objects. Hegel argues that the history of consciousness has three main parts which correspond to the three main phases of consciousness: consciousness, self-consciousness and reason. In this process, the mind evolves to higher and higher stages of consciousness.

The first is the stage of consciousness, which is also the stage of sense-certainty. Here the mind is aware of the presence of other objects around it. It uncritically apprehends particular objects by the senses. The knowledge gained from sensations are conceived here as the most certain and basic. Hegel then points out the inadequacies and limitations of this stage. He says that, in order to describe such an object of immediate acquaintance we need to employ universal categories. For example, when we say that there are five fingers in a hand, we employ universal categories of quantity, quality, modality, relations etc., which Kant had demonstrated in his first *Critique*. For the mind to categorize the sensible knowledge as something we need to apply certain *a priori* categories that it derives from itself. In science, for instance, we invoke metaphenomenal or unobservable entities to explain sense phenomena. To understand the source of these *a priori* structures, consciousness has to turn back on itself and become self-conscious. To summarise this process, we may say that, sense certainty can say THAT an object is, but not WHAT it is.

In the stage of self-consciousness, the self is concerned with the external object. This is a more advanced state where the self subordinates the object to itself. It approaches the object in order to comprehend it, use it to its purposes, tries to appropriate it and consume it. This process thus assumes a one-sided action of the subject over the object. But this process is obstructed when the

self confronts other selves, which are not mere objects in the world. Here the self encounters other selves, an encounter which makes it uncomfortable, as it realizes that it cannot approach other self as an object. It cannot objectify another subject, owing to its subjectivity. Again, since, the other is also a subject, which confronts the world of objects including one's own self/subjectivity, it may possibly make one an object of its comprehension; it may objectify the subjectivity of one's self. Consequently, the self feels a desire to cancel out or annihilate the other self as a means to assert its own selfhood. It seeks to annihilate the subjectivities of the other selves, by enslaving them.

Hegel argues that, this endeavour to cancel others' subjectivity is bound to be counterproductive, as the consciousness of one's own selfhood presupposes the recognition of this selfhood by another self. In other words, to be recognized as a subject I need another subject who recognizes me as a subject. For this one needs others to remain as subjects and not just entities which have lost their subjectivity (a slave). To further explicate this position, Hegel refers to the master-slave relationship.

In the stage of self-consciousness, one is intimidated by the presence of other subjects, who can cancel one's subjectivity. The other, who is not just an object and is a subject, may enslave one. Here one may try to enslave the other in order to assert one's own self-hood and freedom. The other is perceived as a threat to one's freedom and the only way out seems to be consisting in enslaving the other by taking away the latter's freedom and not recognizing the latter's personhood. Here one enslaves the other and becomes a master and does not recognize the latter as a real person. But by doing this the master deprives himself of that recognition of his own freedom, which he wanted to be preserved. This freedom was precious for him because it was essential for the development of self-consciousness. The paradox of enslaving the other is that, in this process, the master becomes dependent on the slave for asserting his self-hood. In order to assert one's freedom one enslaves another person and then ironically becomes dependent on the slave and loses one's freedom. The slave on the other hand frees himself through labour, which transforms material things.

Hegel summons that, the final solution to this problem consists, not in enslaving the other but in recognizing the latter's subjectivity. But, as pointed out above, this may pose a threat to one's freedom, as the other as a distinct individual subject poses a threat to one's self-hood. Hegel here proposes to graduate to the highest stage of evolution, reason, where the other and oneself are being recognized as manifestations of the same universal mind.

Reason therefore, is the ultimate stage, where the finite subject rises to universal self-consciousness. It consists in the realization that we are all manifestations of the universal Spirit. This stage is not characterized by the one-sided awareness of oneself as an individual subject threatened by and in conflict with other self-conscious beings. On the other hand, it involves a full recognition of selfhood in oneself and in others. The highest stage of reason is therefore, a synthesis of the first two stages of consciousness and self-consciousness. In consciousness, the subject is aware of the sensible object as something external and heterogeneous to itself. In self-consciousness, the subject's attention is turned back on itself as a finite self. And finally in reason, the subject sees everything as the objective expression of infinite Spirit with which it is itself united.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is true of Hegel's idealism?
[a] The absolute encompasses only the objective and not the subjective aspects [b] Absolute bridges the finite with the infinite [c] Absolute is a simple system without parts [d] Absolute is different from God.
2. Which of the following is not true?
[a] The absolute is a unity in diversity [b] Real is Rational and rational is Real [c] Absolute spirit is the ultimate reality [d] Absolute Spirit and God are different.
3. According to Hegel, reality is:
[a] A manifestation of the universal mind [b] An integrated and total structure of conceptual truth [c] A totality of abstract minds [d] The ideal universal Spirit which is different from the existing world.
4. According to Hegel, God is:
[a] The living and moving reason of the world [b] Separate from the world [c] The creator of the world [d] Does not reveal himself in the world.
5. What does not characterize the stage of consciousness?

[a] It is a stage of self-certainty [b] The mind is aware of the presence of other objects [c] The mind subordinates the object it experiences to itself. [d] The mind tries to use objects to its purposes.

6. What does not happen in the stage of reason?

[a] The finite subject rises to universal self-consciousness [b] The finite subject realizes itself as a manifestation of the universal Spirit [c] The finite subject tries to enslave others. [d] One recognizes the selfhood in oneself and in others.

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [d]
3. [b]
4. [a]
5. [c]
6. [c]

Assignments

1. Discuss Hegel's conception of Absolute.
2. Describe the phenomenology of spirit.

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Chapter 26

Karl Marx: Historical Materialism

Key Words: Marxism, Communism, class differences, base structure, super structure, labour, production, mode of production, means of production, revolution, Capitalism, proletariat, material forces.

This chapter deals with the philosophy of Karl Marx, the renowned founder of the Marxist or Communist school of thought. Karl Marx is a thinker who insisted that philosophy should not be a mere theoretical exercise. Instead, it should make changes in the way people live by abolishing exploitation, disparities and social inequalities. To present his view he proposed a conception of history, the materialist conception, which primarily addressed the problem of human alienation and sought to find solutions to the problem. He conceived human history as a history of class conflicts and proposed a classless society, where the conflicts would be ultimately resolved along with all the fundamental philosophical problems human beings encounter. In order to overcome the problem of human alienation, Marx proposes to change the world and identified ways to materialize this. The materialist conception of history outlines the fundamental problematic and the way out.

Materialistic Conception of History

For Marx, it is important to understand that human reality is essentially historical and is driven by material forces. Historical materialism is an attempt to explain the origin and development of the society from a materialistic perspective. It deals with the most general laws of social development, where it identifies material forces playing crucial roles in the formation and evolution of human societies. The most important aspect of social reality is the economic structure of a particular society; the ways in which different groups of people are related to economic resources of the society and their respective production relationships.

The materialistic conception of history opposes the idealistic understanding of history and endeavours replacing it with a scientific and materialist understanding. He was enthused by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which explained the evolution of the species in terms of the process of natural selection. The emerging modern science was another inspiration.

Marx envisages overthrowing many established theories of history, which consider factors like the consciousness, will of people, supernatural forces, various ideas or theories etc., as important in deciding the course of history and human destiny. The Marxian materialist approach tries to trace this by examining the factors that propel the development of human societies from their prehistorical days. Marx says that human societies develop in accordance with certain laws, which are independent of the wishes and desires of people. He argues that the development of society can be seen as a process of social production. The different stages of human evolution from the apes to complex society formations are examined in order to develop his theory.

Marx says that, in the process of social production human beings come together and enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will and desire. He thus sees the crucial role of labour, both in human origin from the apes and in the evolution of different forms of complex social formations. Darwin was credited for scientifically explaining man's origin. He traced it in the animal world and explained the evolution of more and more complex forms of life from simpler organisms. Darwin's theory of evolution thus provides an account of the discovery of the law of development of organic nature. Combining these various insights from different intellectual debates taking place during his times Marx, along with his companion Frederick Engels had laid the foundations of a new philosophical theory, which tries to explain the process of social development from a historical perspective and seeks to solve many human problems with a materialistic conception.

Engels provides an account of the important role labour had played in the origin of man, which was later developed into a theory that explains the law of development of human history by highlighting the link between social production and human evolution. Engels says that our ancestors have learned how to make use of their front extremities for simple operations, which were prehensile functions. One such important stage in the process of human evolution is the erection gait, where the ape started differentiating its hand from its foot. This had led to the realization that the hand can be used for holding tools, which can be employed for fulfilling certain purposes. This is the emergence of labour, an ability which man possesses, which distinguishes him from the rest of the living creatures.

The possibility of labour with the body and the hand, with which man started making desirable changes in his surroundings have eventually brought people together and stimulated mutual assistance and joint activity, which ultimately led to the emergence of social production. These fundamental insights were later supplemented by the natural laws governing life, which explained how humans react to nature.

With the emergence of labour and production people started coming together to form social structures. Out of and together with the labour process language also had emerged, which further stimulated the development of brain and the emergence of consciousness and it also facilitated the conditions for separate useful actions. Therefore, labour, which constitutes the core of man's material life—by means of which man interacts with nature in order to survive—is responsible even for the development of his consciousness. Engels writes:

Labour and speech were the two essential stimuli under the influence of which the brain of the ape gradually changed into that of man. Hand in hand with the development of the brain went the development of its most immediate instruments – the senses.

The specialization of the hand had indicated that humans could then handle and employ tools in order to make changes in nature. This process is termed as production, which Marx conceived as a specific human activity. Again, when people started coming together and cooperate, it resulted in social production. Marx considers production as the distinctive human activity. He writes:

The spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own.

While proposing a materialist conception of history Marxism distinguishes its philosophical outlook with a peculiar conception of materialism, which is known as dialectical materialism. Marxism opposes both the idealists—who claim that it is consciousness which determines matter—and the view of metaphysical materialism—which asserts that it is matter which determines consciousness—and affirms that, while matter determines consciousness, the latter in turn influences the former.

In order to understand the materialist conception of history and dialectical materialism we need to clarify certain basic concepts employed by Marxism. From the outset, Marxism outlines the several components of the production of material wealth. They are the **Objects of labour**, which are constitutive of the earth, plant and animal world. They are the objects acted upon by man. The **means of labour or production** are the things that people place between themselves and the objects of labour. These are constitutive of the instruments of labour like the axe, saw, lathe, machines etc.

Another important component is the **productive forces of society**, consisting of the knowledge and skill of the working people that are inevitable for the creation of material wealth. They characterize the material relations between society and nature. Another component is constitutive of the **production relations**, which are based on the ownership of the means of production.

Marxism affirms that the **productive forces** and **production relations** constitute the mode of production of a particular society, which exists as objective reality, independently of the desire, will and consciousness of people. Marx claims that the mode of production of a particular society is not static as it changes and develops all the time. The changes in production are initiated by changes in production relations, which in turn lead to the transformation of the entire social system, social ideas and political views, which make up the superstructure of the society.

One of the central ideas of Marxian philosophy is summarized in Marx's observation; "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world, but the point is, to change it." Marx thus wants to make changes in the world, by making changes in the material conditions which he believed determine the very course of human life, in order to resolve the fundamental philosophical problem of human alienation. He believed that such changes could be materialized by changing the mode of production of a society; by replacing the essentially exploitative mode of production with a model that reflects the essence of man's species being. By replacing the socio-economic system that constitutes a society we can change the mode of production of that society.

In this context Marx realizes that the productive forces in a society develop faster than production relations and they may also conflict with each other. This conflict can be resolved by; (i) replacing the old production relations with new ones

(ii) by destroying or overthrowing the old socio-economic formation, and finally, (c) by replacing it by a new one.

We may outline the law of social-economic formation. It is the result of the conflict between production forces and production relations. Marxism affirms that this universal law had governed the entire history of human societies, by governing all progress of material production and of society as a whole. According to Marxism, there are five socio-economic formations. They are:

1. The primitive-communal.
2. Slave-owning.
3. Feudal.
4. Capitalist.
5. Communist.

Marx claims that, in each formation, the conflict between production forces and production relations ultimately reaches the stage of revolution. This happens because the conflict makes the system unable to sustain without a change. Every socio-economic formation thus encounters a stage of social upheaval, a stage of revolution, after which there will be a transition from one socio-economic formation to another. Marxism sees this as a socio-historical and law-governed process of development of human society and it argues that this process underlines the progressive character of social development.

A very important aspect of the materialistic interpretation is the emphasis it gives to the economic aspects or more particularly, to the mode of production and the nature of production relationships. Marx thus distinguishes between the base structure of a society from its super structure, where the former is represented by the material relations and the latter stands for the political and ideological relations. The base structure is the base of a society and it consists of the totality of the historically determined relations of production. The superstructure, on the other hand, stands for the totality of the ideological relations, views, and institutions like the law and the state, morality, religion, philosophy, art, political and legal forms of consciousness and the institutions corresponding to them. This distinction between base and super structures refers to the social relations of a historically determined society as a total system. Marx and Engels write:

In the social production which people carry on, they enter into relations that are defined, indispensable, and independent of their will; these relations of

production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real base, on which rise legal and political superstructures and to which correspond defined forms of social consciousness.

But the base structure is not an independent or autonomous domain unaffected by the changes that take place in the superstructure. Marx points to an interactive-dialectic element that determines the entire system and relations of a social formation. The historical changes in the base are derived from and determined by the changes in the nature of the productive forces of society and the historically determined base in turn determines the nature and type of the social superstructure.

A radical change in the economic structure of a given society produces changes and radical transformation in the entire social superstructure. Here Marx expects the proletariat or the working class playing a crucial role. This is because the idea of class struggle is central to the Marxian conception, as it conceives it as the source of social development. Marxism explains production relations in terms of class relations.

According to Marxism, there are broadly two classes in the history of human societies; the haves and the have nots. The difference between them is based on the way they are related to the means of production. A class stands for a group of people which is different from other groups in terms of their relationship to the means of production. Each class has its unique role to play in the social organization of labour as each class's mode of appropriating and ownership of public wealth vary. In order to explicate this further, Marx examines the emergence of classes in human history.

Marx says that the primitive society was classless, as people lived in small communes enjoying equal rights and everything was common. But in such societies the level of economic development was very low. Later, with social development and progress, classes evolved in relation to production relationships, which introduced the fundamental dichotomy between the haves and have-nots. In the capitalist societies, this difference is between the capitalists who own the property and industrial houses and the proletariat or the working class who are propertyless. Marx also observes that there will be a constant struggle between the classes of the haves and the have-nots and hence between the capitalists and the proletariat. The significant contribution of

Marx to philosophy consists in interpreting this struggle as a struggle for overcoming alienation.

Marx on Alienation

Marx conceives money as the alienated essence of human labour and life. He says that money or man's alienated essence dominates him as he worships it and hence money is a barrier to human freedom. Hence, in order to overcome alienation we have to abolish money and also abolish private property, which makes it inevitable. To explain this further Marx points to the intimate link between labour and alienation.

According to Marx, labour is the fundamental activity of man. In simple terms it is the way by means of which man obtains the means of subsistence by interaction with nature. In the case of living creatures other than humans, there is no interaction between them and nature. Man's interaction with nature is labour and it is also an instrument for man's self-creation. But under capitalism the worker and the product of his labour are separated, which ultimately leads to alienated labour.

Marx observes that, ideally the product of labour should remain with the labourer, as it is the way he creates himself and hence it is his essence. But under alienated labour of capitalism, the proletariat does not have any right over his product which is the result of his labour. He does not own the means of production and hence he is forced to exchange the product of his labour—which actually is his own essence—for money or wages. Hence his relationship with the product characterizes alienation. He has no right or control over the product and hence it appears before him as an alien object. It stands over and above him, opposed to him as an independent power. The product, which is his essence, is separated from him in the act of production itself. Hence he is alienated from himself in the very act of production. Since he has no power, right or control of what he produces, he is unable to view his work as a part of his real self.

The proletariat, as mentioned above, will then be exchanging his labour, his activity of production, which is his method of self-creation and creation of his own essence, for the wages he is paid for. Hence the product appears before him as an alienated object. The money for which he has exchanged it becomes his enemy, as it

becomes the symbol of his alienation. The more he worships this money, the more he becomes alienated from himself.

Again, the work he does in cooperation with others should make him a part of humanity, the human species. Marx observes that his species-life constitutes his social essence. But under the conditions of alienated labour this social essence is taken away from him. Here he is alienated from other men, as instead of cooperation with others in the act of social production, he competes with them, as what determines his value is the capitalist principle of demand and supply. The more the supply is, the less becomes the demand of a product. In capitalism, the worker is a product and the more they are, the less the demand for them in capitalist establishments, which aim at profit maximization. Here one's fellow worker becomes a threat to one's own interests. Man thus becomes alienated from humanity and his social self.

In order to overcome alienation, Marx proposes the abolition of private property, as it is the latter, which causes alienation from nature and other men. This consists in the abolition of Wages and money and not just a hike in the wages, as that would not resolve the fundamental problem of alienation.

Marx here proposes initiating a revolution by the proletariat class. The dialectical relationship and the clashes between the capitalists and the proletariat leads to the formation of a classless society. Capitalists and proletariats are the two classes, which constitute the thesis and the anti thesis, and the classless society is the synthesis. Marx says that this dialectics actually emerges from the concept of private property itself. Private property creates its own antithesis, as in order to exist it must also maintain the existence of the propertyless working class. But to be propertyless is to suffer the loss of essence and get alienated and in order to overcome this the proletariat has to abolish itself as well as private property. Hence in the Marxian idea of classless society, both private property and class differences will disappear.

Overcoming Alienation: The Role of the Proletariat

Marx sees the very crucial role played by the propertyless proletariat class in this process of overcoming alienation and liberating both the exploited as well as the exploiter; humanize the entire humanity. The proletariat recognizes their plight and realizes the reasons for their alienated status. But a mere criticism alone is not

sufficient to change this situation. The root cause of this alienation consists in the establishment of certain forms of modes of production and the material forces that support them. Marx says that material forces must be overthrown by material forces and he locates the force that can overthrow the existing capitalist mode of production in the working class.

Moreover, the proletariat constitutes a sphere of society having a universal character because of its universal suffering. While the property-owning classes can win freedom on the basis of the rights to property, the propertyless working class possesses nothing. In order to liberate themselves and gain freedom, they have to change the socio-economic formation and the mode of production system that are exploitative and alienating. Actually the capitalist system alienates, not only the proletariat. It also dehumanizes the capitalist as the class conflicts that are inevitably present in capitalism will obstruct individuals from participating in man's species life. The proletariat here has to take the initiative and liberate themselves and also the entire humanity. In this sense, the proletariat represents the whole of humanity. They represent the whole of human suffering due to the lack of freedom and lost essence.

Marxism is a philosophical system, which gained wide acceptance and popularity in many parts of the world. It had inspired revolutions in many parts of the world and initiated changes in the production relations that existed in the world since industrial revolution. Like many other great philosophers Marx tried to address the problem of human suffering and alienation. But unlike others, he identified the root of these problems in the way human societies socially and economically organized themselves and suggested the ways by which these problems could be resolved.

Quiz

1. Which factor does Marx's conception of history emphasize the most?
[a] Consciousness and will of people [b] Supernatural forces [c] Grand ideas
[d] Social production
2. What constitute the productive forces of a society?
[a] The earth, plant and animal world [b] The instruments of labour [c] The knowledge and skill of the working people [d] The ownership of the means of production.

3. What constitute the mode of production of a society?
[a] Productive forces and means of production [b] Productive forces and production relations [c] Objects of labour and production relations [d] Production relations and productive forces.
4. What is not true of the base structure?
[a] The material relations [b] The totality of the historically determined relations of production [c] Economic structure [d] The totality of the ideological relations
5. Why is the proletariat important in initiating revolution?
[a] They have nothing to lose [b] They alone are powerful to make changes [c] They constitute the material forces that can overthrow the existing capitalist mode of production [d] They alone can initiate violent revolution.
6. According to Marx, what is the biggest barrier to human freedom?
[a] Money [b] Capitalists [c] Political power [d] Classes.

Answer Key

1. [d]
2. [c]
3. [b]
4. [d]
5. [c]
6. [a]

Assignment

1. Describe the materialistic conception of history and historical materialism.
2. What is alienation according to Marx and how can it be overcome?

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Chapter 27

Nietzsche: Critique of Western Culture

Key Words: Religion and Morality, Will to power, master morality, slave morality, herd morality, overman, superman, death of god, good and evil, moral nihilism.

Introduction

Freiderich Nietzsche is arguably the most important philosopher of 20th century in terms of his influence on many contemporary thinkers, like Heidegger, Foucault, Rorty and many others who belong to the different schools of thought. Rorty even says that 20th century philosophy is to a great extent post-Nietzschean philosophy. In all sense he was an unconventional thinker and an ardent critic of modernity.

Nietzsche was born in 1844 in Rocken in Prussia and his early education was on literature, particularly, Greek and German literature. In 1865, he joined the University of Leipzig and it was during this time, he started distancing from the Christian faith. In 1869, started teaching classical philology at the University of Basel, but soon poor health forced him to end his teaching career. In 1889 he had a sudden mental breakdown and became psychotic and he died in 1890.

Nietzsche was the advocate of a culture and society that would create stronger and more fully-developed individuals. He thought that, the major hurdle in realizing this is the moral and ideological spirit of the modern age. While many of his contemporaries saw modernity as a boon, offering humanity a more meaningful world, Nietzsche conceived it as the major obstacle towards human development. He waged an uncompromising war against the prevailing rational, moral and religious approaches to human reality. He argues that, “mankind does not represent a development toward something better or stronger or higher, in the sense accepted today. “Progress” is merely a modern idea, that is, a false idea.” [Nietzsche: Preface to *The Antichrist*] It will be interesting to read these lines along with what another

great thinker of 20th century, Sigmund Freud said about modern culture. He says: “I have been careful to refrain from the enthusiastic prejudice that sees our civilization as the most precious thing we possess or can acquire, and believes that its path will necessarily lead us to heights of perfection hitherto undreamt of.” [Freud: *Civilization and its Discontents*]

Nietzsche's critique of Western Civilization begins with his comparison of the nineteenth-century European and German culture with the culture of ancient Greece. He argues that, compared to the high culture of the latter, the former is sick and inferior and it worships weakness and mediocrity. He then examines the important features of the superior Greek civilization, which according to him was a blend of Dionysian and Apollonian traits, the two central principles in Greek culture. The creative conflicts between these two contrasting traits were responsible for the superiority of Greek civilization and were responsible for all the fabulous achievements it made in various fields of human enquiries.

Apollo and Dionysus are the two Greek Gods, who exhibit contrasting characters. Apollo is the god of medicine, music and poetry. He is also the god of archery. Those who share the Apollonian traits are well ordered, rational and serene. Nietzsche claims that all types of form or structure and rational thought are Apollonian. On the other hand, Dionysians are wild, frenzied and sensuous, as Dionysus is the god of ecstasy, terror, guilt and atonement, death and resurrection, vegetation, trees, wine, madness, and drama. According to Nietzsche, all forms of enthusiasm and ecstasy are Dionysian. The ancient Greek civilization had witnessed a fruitful merger of these two contradictory traits, where the principle of individuation, self-control, order, and equilibrium was merged with the inclination to break any border and norm, and to lose self-control. This was responsible for the glory of ancient Greek civilization, which according to Nietzsche did not last long.

The Greek culture soon encountered more rational and systematic philosophical systems sphere headed by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. They have idealized the rational element and disregarded the passionate aspects. Nietzsche argues that the spirit of dialectics severely damaged the primordial instincts and life forces of man and culture. He introduces the notion of will to power in this context,

which are the fundamental driving forces of all living creatures and the basic impulse of all our acts.

According to Nietzsche, life is an instinct of growth, for survival, for the accumulation of forces and for power. Life itself is Will to Power, he affirms. It is essentially an instinct for growth and for continuance. He disregards all other values and virtues of life, which the rational ethical traditions of post-Socratic philosophies have advocated. Instead, Nietzsche idealizes power and argues that nothing in life has value except the degree of power. He affirms that, where the will to power is lacking there is decline. Criticizing the so-called supreme values of mankind, he argues that they all are characterized by a lack of will to Power.

This will to power is not just a will to survive or preserve one's existence. Instead, it is a proactive force: to *act* in life and not just to react. Nietzsche says that every living thing does everything it can, not just to preserve it and simply exist, but to become more. But at the same time, it is not a power over others, but the feelings of creative energy and control over oneself that are necessary to achieve self-creation, self-direction and to express individual creativity.

The most important obstacle in the path of realizing this will is moral and religious beliefs and the social establishments created to promote them. Nietzsche affirms that all morality and religion are against this, as all of them demand submission. According to Nietzsche, all of them are anti-nature and anti-body and they attempt to discipline the body and to kill the will to power. They try to replace the will with obedience and the natural freedom with submission and creativity with loyalty.

Ancient culture was free from the grip of these moral and religious traditions. With the emergence of the rational philosophical tradition of Plato and Aristotle, the decline begins. According to Nietzsche, they discounted the body as the seat of emotions and idealized the rational mind over the passionate will. As a result they idealized tame mediocrity. Later, with the rise of Christianity this decline was complete. The Church demanded complete submission and it developed a morality that idealized obedience and loyalty. Modernity has not changed the situation drastically, as its philosophical perspective too was keen on developing ethical

frameworks that subsume the body and its passions. The creation of mediocrity has become the central motif of Western civilization. As a result of all these, the Western civilization has been dominated by a morality of the good and evil.

To clarify this further, Nietzsche introduces a distinction between master morality and herd morality. The master morality tries to dominate and it is antithetical to all forms of submission. It follows the bodily drives and never tries to submit it to any other form of authority like reason or religious beliefs. It rejects the fundamental distinction every moral traditions make; between good and evil. In this sense, it is beyond good and evil and even, beyond morality.

On the other hand, slave morality is the morality of submission and slavery. It is created by domesticating the body. Nietzsche says that the ascetic priests have created the slave morality as negating the body was essential in their programme. They transformed powerlessness and resentment into discipline and social control. Nietzsche observes that, it is with the creation of this slave morality the weak took revenge on the strong. He says that slave morality “channels resentment inward against the body and outward against enemies of the herd”. He adds that by domesticating the body the weaker individuals resent the prerogatives of the stronger and carried out a transvaluation of values, overturning previous master morality in favor of slave moralities which promise salvation in a future heaven in exchange for submission and obedience to social forces and institutions.

This morality, which insists on disciplining the body by suppressing all bodily drives and passions, is the morality of the herd. It negates and sacrifices the body. As mentioned above, it insists that the individual should submit him/herself and be obedient to the social forces and institutions for the sake of salvation in a future heaven. Nietzsche observes that religions, particularly Christianity in Europe, have promoted such a herd morality. He argues that, Christianity became popular in Europe with the majority adopting it. It was the Roman slave class, which initially adopted Christianity, who afterwards idealized its moral framework in order to justify their liberation from their oppressors. They universalized slavery and insisted that everyone should observe the authority of the Church and its doctrines, which was intolerant to all forms of individual brilliance.

The herd morality works on the basis of the dichotomy of good and evil. Nietzsche thus calls it a morality of good and evil. He argues that this dichotomy was at the base of the modern sickness. According to the moral framework of Christianity the good represents the divine that is responsible for the intrinsic value people and the world possess. Since all are God's creations, Christianity propagates a form of equality, a form of soul atomism, which asserts that all souls are at the equal level. Nietzsche is of the view that this idea that all are equals, undercuts the very notion of human development, which presupposes a free exercise of the will to power, suppression and domination.

Nietzsche says that, for these reasons the slaves viewed the behavior of the powerful warrior types as evil. The latter are uninhibited by conscience and hence are considered as ruthless. Therefore, the morality of the good and evil considers the morality of the strong men who dominate and rule as evil. Nietzsche argues that it is only among the strong we find an expression of independent brilliance. Such men are capable of realizing their desires directly by freely exercising their passions and will to power. On the other hand, the weak represents cowardice and helplessness and find themselves overshadowed by the strong. Despite being a minority the strong exercises their will to power and dominates. The weak therefore have invented the morality of good and evil or the herd morality in order to liberate themselves from the strong men and their master morality. They have eventually invented the notion of evil to characterize what is at the core of the behaviour of the strong.

The herd morality, with its conception of good and evil thus rescued them from their enslavement. The weak liberated themselves by making everyone weak. They were intolerant towards all who exhibit independent brilliance and therefore, are capable of defining their own place in the world. Nietzsche sees this creation of the new morality as the revenge of the weak and helpless upon the strong. While commenting upon the 19th century European culture and its conception of the intrinsic worth of moral values Nietzsche observes:

The intrinsic worth of these values was taken for granted as a fact of experience and put beyond question. Nobody, up to now, has doubted that the "good" man represents a higher value than the "evil," in terms of promoting and benefiting mankind generally, even taking the long view. But suppose the

exact opposite were true....What if morality should turn out to be the danger of dangers?... [Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*]

He thus wages a war against the very underlying conception of the morality that maintains a distinction between good and evil. Opposing the ways in which morality was conceived in human societies, Nietzsche argues that since morality is not a science, there cannot be any moral facts. He observes that morality has been based on obedience and the authority of the social institutions, rules and the church had played a crucial role in instituting it. He then argues that moral and religious judgments belong to a level of ignorance, as all value judgments concerning life are stupidities.

Nietzsche makes a detail analysis of what is understood as modern morality, which according to him is characterized by its complete neglect of the will to power and other important passions of life. He maintains that the two prominent schools of modern ethics, utilitarianism and Kantian ethics have reduced the great passion of living to calculations and difficult formulas. According to him these two great traditions have weakened the human spirit by controlling and domesticating its creativity and selfish passions. They have contributed to creating and strengthening the herd morality, which in its essence consists in a denial of life. On the other hand Nietzsche maintains that life is essentially appropriation, injury, conquest of the strange and weak, suppression, severity, obtrusion of peculiar forms, incorporation, and at the least, putting it mildest, exploitation. [Nietzsche: *Beyond good and Evil*]

Nietzsche then examines what constitutes the basis of morality and affirms that it is the conception of universal and unchanging Truth. The ideas of God and other-worldliness advocated by Christianity and other religions are associated with this notion. Christianity postulates a notion, which believes in the essential goodness in human nature. In the philosophical traditions we find conceptions of human nature being identified with the rational faculty. Since Plato onwards this tendency was strong in Western thought. Christianity divinized this notion and postulated its conception of good on the basis of the idea human nature, which by virtue of being a creation of God, is divine in nature. In the enlightenment era, philosophers like Kant further developed the idea of the essential rational faculty in man and tried to base their ethical theories upon it.

During the modern age this idea of unchanging universal truth has undergone some changes, particularly with the historical approach initiated by Darwin and Hegel. This new perspective has given rise to the notion of Truth that evolves. As a consequence, this notion of truth cannot claim an absolute status. Since it evolves, the changing times and places may have important impacts on its conceptualization. In other words, this position makes the idea of a perspectival truth sensible. This changed perspective on truth has also challenged conceptions of universal truth and universal human nature.

Following these insights Nietzsche argues that the notion of otherworldliness, which is central to Christian morality, is invented in order to ensure smooth succession of the status quo. It prevents all free exercise of the will to power from individuals and effectively check all emergence and expressions of individual brilliance. The underlying herd morality intends to promote equality, which demands unconditional submission from individuals. What then is truth according to Nietzsche? He says:

Truth is a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins. [Nietzsche: "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense"]

Nietzsche develops his moral nihilism, from this general nihilistic position, which denies truth any universal value. His theory affirms that truth is undoubtedly perspectival. Hence we can no longer maintain any distinction between good and evil. This nihilism makes everything permitted, a position which will open up a boundless area of freedom of strong men and races to freely exercise their will to power and dominate and realize their development. Dichotomies that were central to moral philosophy like just and unjust, good and evil are irrelevant in such a situation.

Nietzsche argues that modern age has made this nihilism inevitable and this had ultimately resulted in the death of God, where the latter stood for all that is universally and eternally divine and right. The phrase "death of God" is used for

indicating the modern scenario where people have lost faith in absolute values and truths. This has resulted in the spread of perspectivalism. The idea of God that unites all men and gives meaning to human life had died.

With this death of God the moral foundations of Christianity was shattered and the “thou shalt” which contains the gist of the Christian moral commandment lost its meaning. God’s death had created a big vacuum, as it made any form of moral absolute impossible. In Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the protagonist has prophesied about the moral vacuum that came into being after the death of God and has proclaimed the need for discovering new realities for man. He insists on creating new meaning out of the chaotic aftermath of God's death. The concept of overman or superman is introduced in this context. This overcoming of man has to be achieved undergoing three stages of moral development: the stages of the Camel, the Lion and the Child.

The Camel represents the average man, who unquestionably accepts the authority of the “thou shalt”. The camel’s attitude of kneeling down in accepting its load is comparable to the average human being’s attitude of kneeling down to carry the weight of what he/she believe are his/her duties. These duties are prescribed by the society and religious traditions and moral conventions determine what they are. Their major purpose is to normalize the individual, to control his/her individual brilliance and merge him/her with the common moral framework of the society. Like the camel, the average man for whom the “thou shalt” is sacred, the sense of duty is so integral in his self-conception and any violation of the same will invoke a sense of guilt in him/her. The individual, without any protest accepts the burden of the “thou shalt”. As the camel who does not will what it does and only simply obeys what it “ought to do”, the average man gives his will to what he believes are his duties.

In the next stage in the path of moral transformation, the camel converts itself into a lion. Nietzsche says that, like the camel that moves in the desert the spirit moves in its own desert and in the loneliest desert the spirit becomes a lion. He then recognizes the need for freedom and urges to win it and be the master in his own desert. He wants to fight with the great dragon; the “thou shalt”, which is the major hurdle in the metamorphosis of the spirit to the higher state of existence. The spirit

encounters the “thou shalt” in its desert and with a violent negation, kills it. The spirit of the lion says, "I will" and finds the dragon of the “thou shalt” on its way to its freedom and annihilates it.

Nietzsche observes that, even after killing the “thou shalt”, the lion is not completely free from the morality of good and evil. He once loved the "thou shalt" and has treated it as most sacred and now he seeks freedom from this love. The nihilism of the moral imperative, which results from the killing of the “thou shalt” creates a vacuum, which is unfamiliar to the lion. Moreover, it has still not completely liberated itself from its past. It has succeeded in negating the existing moral frameworks by killing the “thou shalt”, but it fails to fill the vacuum with a new morality, which is completely free from the parameters of the earlier one. This new moral outlook demands a further evolution; from the lion to the child. Nietzsche writes:

The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers the world. [Nietzsche's *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, part I, Walter Kaufmann transl.]

The child thus represents the real character one aspires to attain. It is absolutely unremorseful of what it does, as it is unaffected by the morality of the good and evil. It thus represents the overman who says “Yes” to life and creates a new reality and a new self. The child applies its will in developing and achieving unique values and developing autonomy. It creates itself, as no models whatsoever influences it.

Nietzsche's overman is a strong and free individual who has overcome the man in himself. Nietzsche repeatedly summons that we have to overcome the man in us; the man who surrenders, who loves the “thou shalt”, and who finds console in the status co. This overman has overcome his trivial, weak, petty tendencies that make him a lover of the status co. and worshipper of the “thou shalt” through a process of self-overcoming. Consequently he rejects all creations of his self by external factors like religion and morality, He instead creates himself. He has not only overcome the “thou shalt” and the idea of the “ought to be” but also does what he wills. In other

words, he exercises his will to power. He creates his own values, and lives fully and passionately.

Nietzsche adds that, the overman creates a unique new master morality, which is free from the old values and customs. In this sense he is his own judge. He self-creates by overcoming, mastering and transforming his inner chaos into a new order. This however is not an easy task and Nietzsche reminds that only a few individuals succeed in this. Yet he is optimistic about the emergence of the new aristocrats, with their new morality ruling the world. They subscribe to a morality of unequal souls striving to reject the status quo, the “thou shalt” and overpower others. Though they exercise the will to power, among them they practice a different and unique morality. They recognize that they have equal strength and consequently they form a social body existing without necessarily injuring or exploiting others.

In the history of European philosophy, particularly the modern western thought, Nietzsche is a seminal thinker who entertained unique ideas and his theories still exert phenomenal influence on many of the contemporary thinkers. His philosophy does not give us a clear direction in the sense that it prescribes a goal for all human beings. Yet, we may find the presence of teleology in his thought. He identifies a central feature that according to him needs to be nurtured; the will to power. Nevertheless, his teleology is characteristically different from that of many other thinkers. For instance, Aristotle propagates a teleological outlook where he posits eudemonia as the ultimate human goal. He also prescribes a way in which this goal can be attained; by leading a virtuous life. In this way, his approach is prescriptive. But Nietzsche adopts a very different approach. He says:

The new values, and the process of value creation are not prescriptive: “‘This – is now *my* way, – where is yours?’ Thus I answered those who asked me ‘the way.’ For *the* way – does not exist!” [*Thus Spake Zarathustra*]

The metamorphosis of the spirit is not a standardized metaphysical programme. Each one of us has to encounter this in our life and negotiate with our unique situations. There is no “the way” to be prescribed, but we have to discover our own path. No wonder Nietzsche was widely respected by the existentialists like Sartre and Heidegger and the postmodernists like Foucault and Rorty.

Quiz

1. Why did Nietzsche hold that the nineteenth-century European and German culture and Western civilization are sick and inferior compared to the culture of ancient Greece?
(a) Because it is materialistic (b) Because it is mechanistic (c) Because it worships weakness and mediocrity (d) because it is secular.
2. The will to power is not a will to:
(a) Survive (b) Become more (c) Have control over oneself (d) Achieve self-creation.
3. Which is characteristic of slave morality?
(a) Invented by the ruling class to enslave others (b) Emphasizes self-discipline (c) Does not believe in the authority of universal reason (d) Domesticates the body.
4. The basis of herd morality is:
(a) The dichotomy of good and evil (b) The idea of passion (c) The notion of strength (d) The concept of will to power.
5. Which of the following does not characterize an overman?
(a) Exercises his will to power (b) Follows human values (c) Creates his own values (d) Lives fully and passionately.

Answer Key

1. [c]
2. [a]
3. [d]
4. [a]
5. [b]

Assignment

1. Discuss Nietzsche's reevaluation of values.
2. Discuss the overcoming of man through the three stages of moral development as outlined by Nietzsche.

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Chapter 28

Linguistic Turn in British philosophy and Russell's Logical Atomism

Key Words: Linguistic turn, linguistic meaning, analytic philosophy, logical analysis of language, surface grammar, depth grammar, atomic fact, logical atomism, molecular proposition.

Introduction

The linguistic turn in British philosophy primarily assumes that all philosophical problems can be understood as problems about linguistic meaning and their proper understanding and solutions can be arrived at with an analysis of language. This approach to philosophy is also known as analytic philosophy, as it underlines the importance of the analysis of language in philosophy. In other words, philosophy is identical with the analysis of language.

It is often stated that analytic philosophy began with the works of G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, who initiated a criticism of the dominant idealistic thought that rejected all plurality and conceived the entire reality as consisting of one absolute spirit. Russell's works were definitely more influential and significant, as the logical foundations of analytic philosophy were laid by his phenomenal work on mathematical logic, the *Principles of Mathematics*. Russell was influenced by the works of logicians like Peano and Frege and was engaged in a project that seeks to define all arithmetical concepts in terms of logical ones and seeks to show that all arithmetical truths were provable from logical ones. In short, following Frege, he too was attempting at a reduction of Mathematics to Logic.

The fashion in which these endeavours were pursued—through an analysis of language—inspired many other philosophers to explore the possibilities of such formal-logical analysis in other areas of language use as well. The logical positivists who developed an independent approach to philosophy and metaphysical problems are thinkers who were encouraged to pursue the style of philosophising adopted by Russell. G.E. Moore also has significantly contributed to this movement, not only with his philosophy that emphasized on a common sense approach to philosophical problems, but also with his analysis and examination of the philosophies of other thinkers, exposing the ambiguity in their statements.

Apart from Moore and Russell, another important thinker who had influenced the formation of analytic philosophy and linguistic philosophy in the Anglo-Saxon world was Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose book *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* was widely read in various philosophical circles and thoroughly discussed. Even Russell himself was influenced by Wittgenstein's early writings and thoughts, though Wittgenstein distanced himself from many of these important philosophical developments which were inspired by his work, as he considered them as misinterpretations or misreadings of his thoughts. Wittgenstein adopted a position which primarily viewed philosophy as an activity of critiquing language and affirmed that its purpose is the logical clarification of thoughts. He asserted that philosophy is not a theory but an activity.

With the works and teachings of all these thinkers, analytic Philosophy has emerged as a method and approach to philosophical thinking that emphasises mostly on the analysis of language. Thinkers who belonged to this group have conducted rigorous examination of philosophically important concepts with a focus on the language in which they are expressed.

Bertrand Russell's Philosophy

Bertrand Arthur William Russell was born on 18 May 1872 to a very reputed family in Britain. Lord John Russell, who was twice Prime Minister of UK and who introduced the Reform Bill of 1832 was his paternal grandfather. In his formative days he was influenced by the philosophies of René Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, George Berkeley, David Hume, Peano, Gottlob Frege, G. E. Moore and A. N. Whitehead. It was in the Trinity College, where he joined in 1890 to study mathematics and he worked with eminent philosophers of that day like A. N. Whitehead, Henry Sidgwick, James Ward, and G. F. Stout. He was also influenced by the Hegelian philosopher J. M. E. McTaggart and took the idealism of Kant and Hegel seriously.

His initial philosophical allegiance was to a kind of idealism, highly influenced by the thinking of Hegel, but more specifically by the neo-Hegelian Oxford philosopher F. H. Bradley, who advocated a version of idealism that reduced all reality into one single spiritual entity. He later rebelled against idealism and abandoned his idealistic phase and along with G.E.Moore, initiated what is known today as analytic philosophy. Russell and Moore carried out detail analysis of the philosophical theories advocated and position adopted by many of the traditional

philosophical schools, particularly idealism, with an intention to expose the linguistic confusions from which they had emerged. They held that such philosophical theories were the result of certain fundamental linguistic confusions and a proper logical analysis of language will make things clearer.

The real turning point in Russell's intellectual life happened when he engaged himself reading mathematics and got interested in logic. He thus began to work on a problem that occupied him to a major part of his career; to see whether mathematics can be supplied with logical foundations. Many people have influenced him in this endeavour, including the Italian logician Giuseppe Peano, whom he met in 1890 and Gottlob Frege, who was also engaged in a very similar kind of exercise. As a result of his work on the topic he has published the important book *The Principles of Mathematics* in 1903.

Along with these excursions into the realm of mathematical logic, Russell was also developing a philosophical position that would later supplement his logical works. This is known as logical atomism, where he construed certain very basic and elementary statements which he called atomic propositions, as constituting language. The structure of language is reflected in the structure of atomic propositions. This structure of elementary linguistic expressions is incidentally identical with the structure of reality as well. These major intellectual developments happened during the period 1899—1900, a period in which certain important changes happened in his academic pursuits, which Russell himself calls a revolution.

Russell's Refutation of Idealism

Idealism is the view, which proclaims that reality is fundamentally mental. Russell's refutation of idealism is unique, as he applies the method of language analysis in order to expose the flaws of idealism as a philosophical position. Incidentally, he himself was under the influence of German idealism during the 1890s and advocated a kind of Hegelian and Bradelian view that asserted that all reality is mental and conceived the universe ultimately consisting of a single Mind which experiences itself.

Since idealism asserts a form of monism—all reality is a single spiritual entity—it rejects the plurality of things, which we normally experience as mere appearance. According to the

idealist, everything is related to everything else in the universe and the universe is ultimately a single thing. Russell, on the other hand held a realist view, which affirmed that objects of experience were independent of the experience of them. This view ultimately leads to pluralism, which asserts that there are many independent things in the world. In order to establish his view, he pursues to refute the fundamental doctrine of idealism; its monistic outlook. According to him, the basis of idealism is the idea that all relations are internal. They affirm that the relation of experience to its objects are internal and hence in reality there are no such relations and therefore, all relations are unreal.

Russell initiates a linguistic analysis of this idealistic view in order to refute it. He holds that both idealism and monism are the results of a linguistic confusion. The idealist holds a fundamentally mistaken view about relations. They thought that all propositions are of the subject-predicate form, where we predicate something to the subject. For example, when we say sugar is sweet, we are predicating sweetness to the object sugar. Hence in this sense we can argue that it is the nature of sugar to be sweet and hence the relationship between sugar and sweet is internal. Consequently, the relationship between them is not something between two things. In other words, they are not different from each other and hence the so-called relationship is unreal.

From this simple fact the idealist argues that every proposition constitutes a predication on reality as a whole. Since all relations are internal and therefore are unreal, the relationship articulated by all propositions is unreal. There exists only one entity, which is homogenous and spiritual. Russell argues that, the mistake of the idealist is to consider all propositions, including relational propositions as possessing a subject-predicate form. Russell seeks to demonstrate that this is not the case. For instance, the proposition, “A is to the left of B” which expresses a relationship which cannot be internal. We cannot say that it is internal to the nature of A to be the left of B. The relation “to the left of” does not belong intrinsically to any spatial object. In other words, no spatial object must of necessity be to the left of other things.

Again, for A to be the left of B there should be two separate entities of A and B. This refutes the fundamental position of idealism and advocates pluralism. Hence Russell’s approach is characterized by the method of language analysis. He approaches the philosophical position of

idealism from the point of view of language analysis and examines how legitimate is their monism and idealism, so that they can logically argue for pluralism. Russell seeks to expose the logical contradictions inherent in this view and argues that by analysing the structure of the propositions held to be true by the idealists we can expose these logical contradictions. The logical analysis of language will bring out this structure. From these basic aspects of language analysis, Russell moves on to develop his theory of logical atomism.

To Logical Atomism

Russell initially adopted a form of phenomenalism, which held that perceptual knowledge could be analyzed in terms of our acquaintance with the fundamental data of sensory experience. His book *Our Knowledge of the External World* and his paper “The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics” advocate this position. In his 1927 book, *The Analysis of Matter* Russell analyses the chief concepts of physics, such as force and matter, in terms of events and here he had adopted a realist position. He holds that, in order to analyze the basic concepts of physics one has to admit that certain entities exist independently of our perception of them. This is to go beyond mere phenomenalism.

Logical atomism is a philosophical view about language, which aims at explaining the relationship between language and the world. It was primarily developed in order to resolve questions about the nature of perception and its relation to physics. It aims at establishing the empirical basis for physical science. Hence it comes up with a theory of the world. Russell thus initiates a metaphysical theory about the physical world and tries to give an account of the nature of reality by exposing its logical structure. His idea of logical analysis is founded on the contention that mathematical logic is the essence of philosophy. In his classic paper “On Denoting”, Russell describes the process of analysis, where he examines the structures of propositions and facts. In this process of language analysis he distinguishes the surface grammar of propositions, which is misleading, from the depth grammar, which refers to the essential logical structure of language.

Russell argues that all propositions are not of the subject-predicate form. According to him, the surface grammar of statements may often mislead us. We may take descriptions and ordinary names to be denoting expressions, while on several occasions they need not do so.

Russell proposes a logical analysis of language in order to resolve such confusions. Such an analysis can bring this out by revealing the structure of propositions. In the above-mentioned paper “On Denotation” Russell takes up an expression “The present King of France is bald” for analysis. His analysis shows that this statement asserts three things:

1. There exists at present at least one person who reigns in France.
2. There exists at present at most one person who reigns in France.
3. Whoever reigns in France is bald.

Now Russell proceeds further and tells that the statement “There exists at present at least one person who reigns in France” is false, as France is not a monarchy. Therefore, concludes Russell, the conjunction of the three statements is also false. It is imperative that, in order to be either true or false the subject of a proposition must refer to something. But since the expression “present King of France” has no reference in the world, the expression is meaningless.

Russell thus affirms that the logical structure of the world and of language is revealed in the proper logical analysis of language. He conceives the world as consisting of facts, which are things with many qualities related in different ways. Russell contends that, a fact can be analyzed into its constituents like things, qualities, and relations. Now, corresponding to facts in the world, there are propositions in language and the former are expressed by propositions, which are forms of words asserted as true or false. By comparing the propositions with the world of facts we assert their truth or falsity.

From these basic contentions Russell examines the basic features of language that are revealed in its logical analysis. The analysis of propositions brings out their logical structure. We can analyze propositions into more and more elementary forms of propositions, which express basic facts and Russell calls them atomic propositions. An atomic proposition asserts that a thing has a certain quality or stands to some other thing in a certain relation. By combining atomic propositions by means of logical words such as and, or, and if—then, we derive a complex or molecular proposition. Russell affirms that, if all the atomic facts are known, and that they are all the atomic facts, we could infer all other truths from them, as they are the most elementary forms of expressions that represent facts in the world.

Therefore, the logical analysis of language exposes the ultimate simple units of linguistic expressions that have immediate acquaintance with the world of facts. Atoms are the last residues of logical analysis. All complex propositions we employ in various fields can be logically analyzed in this fashion. If they cannot be analyzed, if we find any of the expressions lacking a referent in the world, then the proposition in which it appears needs to be treated as meaningless. We can thus proceed to more and more precise, clear and definite knowledge from the obvious and vague ordinary beliefs about the world. We thus arrive at the simple symbols, which immediately refer to facts from the complex symbols or propositions, which we analyze. Through analysis we can reach the point of direct acquaintance with the objects. These objects, according to Russell, are the meanings of simple symbols.

The very idea of logical analysis of language presupposes that there is a hidden structure in language, which is not always obviously visible. In other words, the apparently visible structure need not be the real one and hence it may mislead us. Russell's analysis of the statement, "the present King of France...." Reveals this. Russell thus makes a distinction between the surface grammar of linguistic expressions from the depth grammar. While the former is more visible, it is also misleading. The latter, may lie hidden, but does represent the real structure, which is revealed in logical analysis. Logical analysis thus shows how misleading the surface grammar can be.

Our ordinary languages have misleading structures. The logical structure of linguistic expressions is not apparent from the surface grammar of ordinary languages. Hence they should be logically analyzed. The ambiguous, misleading expressions of ordinary languages can be logically analyzed through descriptions. This according to Russell will reveal the logical structure. This possibility suggests that an ideal language can be developed, which does not have the limitations of ordinary languages. Such an ideal language will be free from all possible logical errors. It thus brings out the logical structure or the depth grammar of linguistic expressions and leaves no room for doubts or confusions. In such a language, each word will have an object to represent and an object will have one and only one symbol. This notion of an ideal language is not Russell's creation, as it has been existent in philosophical circles since long. But Russell's idea of logical analysis had given it a new life. Many philosophers, particularly the thinkers of the logical positivism movement were inspired by such Russelian ideas.

Russell is a very important thinker in the history of western philosophy, as his endeavours, along with G.E. Moore had opened a new way of philosophizing in the beginning of 20th century. He has influenced and inspired many different movements in 20th century Anglo-Saxon philosophy. Arguably his most important contribution is *The Principles of Mathematics*, which laid the foundations of mathematical logic. This book and many other writings of Russell have significantly contributed to the development of symbolic logic.

Quiz

1. What was the primary objective of Russell's work on mathematical logic?
[a] Reduction of mathematics to logic [b] Reduction of logic to mathematics
[c] Reduction of philosophy to logic [d] Reduction of metaphysics to logic.
2. G.E. Moore's philosophy emphasized on?
[a] Logical analysis of language [b] Common sense [c] Metaphysical problems [d] Propositions of natural sciences.
3. According to Russell, both idealism and monism are the results of?
[a] A metaphysical error [b] A logical impossibility [c] A logical contradiction [d] A linguistic confusion.
4. Idealism essentially asserts?
[a] Pluralism [b] Dualism [c] Monism [d] Materialism.
5. Which according to Russell does an idealist not hold?
[a] All relations are internal [b] There are many entities which are related to each other
[c] All propositions possess a subject-predicate form [d] All relations are unreal.
6. How do we logically analyze the ambiguous, misleading expressions of ordinary languages?
[a] Through descriptions [b] Through mathematical logic [c] Through explanation [d] Through syntactical analysis.

Answer Key

1. [a]
2. [b]
3. [d]
4. [c]
5. [b]
6. [a]

Assignments

1. Explain the important features of linguistic turn.
2. Describe logical atomism.

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Chapter 29

Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy

Key Words: Picture theory, meaning, proposition, object, state of affairs, metaphysical self, logical structure, semantic analysis, atomic facts, elementary propositions, sense, seeing and showing, surface grammar, depth grammar, transcendental subject, silence.

This chapter addresses certain important aspects of the conceptions of language, meaning and reality and their interrelationships, as discussed in Wittgenstein's early work, *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*. It will start with an examination of the picture theory of meaning, which exposes the logical structure of language with an analysis of the concepts of word, meaning, sense, logical form and the forms of propositions. It then examines the questions, how do philosophical problems arise and how do we solve them. The *Tractatus* is also concerned about very profound philosophical problems like the nature of the self, which is immortal. It concludes with a notion of silence, which will be examined in this chapter.

Introduction

Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein was born on April 26th 1889 in Vienna, Austria. He studied mechanical engineering in Berlin and in 1908 went to Manchester, England to do research in aeronautics. There he became interested in logic, as the study of mathematics, led him to do further explorations into the foundations of mathematics. The most important event in his intellectual life during this period happened when he met Gottlob Frege, who is arguably the founder of modern logic as we understand it today. Frege suggested Wittgenstein to meet Bertrand Russell in Cambridge. Wittgenstein eventually went there and worked with Russell and G.E. Moore, the two great thinkers of 20th century British analytic philosophy, who were also known as the philosophers who have initiated this new way of philosophizing in 20th century Europe.

Wittgenstein, though earned the reputation of being an original thinker at a very early age in Cambridge, was a very different kind of person and entertained very unconventional ideas. In 1914, when the First World War broke out he volunteered for the Austrian army and left his research. By 1922, he has completed writing his first book *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which was subsequently published with a preface by Russell. This book incidentally is the only one he published during his lifetime.

After writing the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein thought that he had solved all the problems of philosophy and hence he decided to leave philosophy. In any case, he was not prepared to take up a conventional university teaching job, as philosophy was for him not an enterprise that would enable one to advance one's knowledge; nor can one teach philosophy, he thought, as there is nothing to be taught by a philosopher. He thus took up the vocation of an elementary school teacher in rural Austria.

Later in 1929, he returned to Cambridge and to philosophy and resumed his investigations into the nature of philosophical problems and their possible solutions. He became professor of philosophy at Cambridge in 1939. During this period he advocated a characteristically different philosophical position from his early work. In 1947, he resigned his professorship in order to concentrate on writing. Wittgenstein died of prostate cancer in Cambridge in April 1951.

The Philosophy of the *Tractatus*

Wittgenstein affirms that the main point of his book is ethical, which according to him, does not belong to the realm of the sayable. Reflecting the spirit of the philosophy of language analysis propagated by Russell, Wittgenstein too problematizes the language-world relationship and explores the problem of meaning. According to him, philosophy is a critique of language. It performs a logical analysis of language, which will bring out the essential logical structure of all linguistic expressions.

In other words, according to Wittgenstein, philosophy tries to identify the essential logical structure of language, a structure which it shares with the world and with our thoughts. In this sense, philosophy sets limits to what can be thought and in doing so what cannot be thought. But this is a task which is very similar to the one advocated by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, this is not an easy task, as Wittgenstein says, in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides of the limit thinkable, which is absurd. Here the philosopher of language turns to the expressions of thoughts, which share with the latter a common logical structure. In other words, the limits are drawn in language.

Wittgenstein's examination of language had revealed that the language we use in our day-to-day life has an essentially misleading structure. Language disguises thought, says Wittgenstein, so much so that, like the cloths we wear, which disguises our body, language

too essentially covers thoughts which leads to several misunderstandings. Nevertheless, language is an expression of thought, which need not always be visible from the outset.

The problems of philosophy are posed as a result of the misunderstanding of the logic of language. He thus advances a critique of language—which resembles Kant’s critique of thought—that would enable us to see the mistakes we commit. The analysis of language will bring out the real, logical structure of language. It reveals the depth grammar of language, which is different from the surface grammar. While the ordinary structure of language is determined by the syntactical structure, the real structure is discovered by the semantic analysis of language that brings out the essential logical scaffolding of language. The syntactic structure is misleading, as it never reveals the essential word-meaning connection. But the logical analysis of language brings this out. This analysis thus brings out the depth grammar of linguistic expressions as different from the surface grammar and helps avoiding the confusions in language use, which is ultimately responsible for philosophical and metaphysical worries.

The Philosophical Orientation of the *TLP*

The basic philosophical orientation of the *TLP* can be understood by explaining the fundamental approach it adopts while dealing with traditional philosophical and metaphysical problems. The solutions to philosophical problems are suggested by articulating the sense-nonsense distinction. By outlining how philosophy is preoccupied with language and its analysis—as it has been conceived as a critique of language—Wittgenstein demonstrates that philosophy does not and cannot deal with the so called problems of life. He then develops his transcendentalism, primarily by referring to the metaphysical self, which is the limit of the world, and not part of it. His transcendentalism also mentions about the domain of silence, which is an extremely important aspect of his early thought.

Wittgenstein thus asserts that philosophy is not a theory, but is an activity. The function of philosophy consists in carrying out a critique of language, which involves an analysis. This analysis will bring out the logical structure of language, which corresponds to the logical structure of our thoughts and the world. There exists a one-to-one correspondence between the three realms of language, thought and the world.

The World, Thought and Language

Tractatus begins with the proposition, “The world is all that is the case”, which is followed by another one, “The world is a totality of facts and not of things.” Wittgenstein’s conception of the world does not exhaust with the physical world we live in and experience. It also deals with the logical possibilities of the states of affair. Reality is constituted out of the world and objects in it and facts and atomic facts. According to him the world is facts in logical space, which is the totality of existent atomic facts. This conception of atomic fact is also a combination of objects in definite ways, each combination is independent of the other. Wittgenstein then affirms that the existence and non-existence of possible and actual atomic facts is the reality.

Thought is described, as the logical picture of the facts and Wittgenstein holds that an atomic fact is thinkable or we can imagine an atomic fact. The world is nothing but a picture of the totality of true thoughts. The thought contains the possibility of the state of affairs, which it thinks and thoughts are expressed through propositions. Wittgenstein calls the sign through which we express the thought a propositional sign and holds that the proposition is the propositional sign in its projective relation to the world. Here the notions of logical structure and logical form are important. Language shares with the world and thoughts the same logical form. As mentioned above, there is a one-to-one relationship between the three realms that is brought out in analysis.

The domain of language is more philosophically important and interesting, as in the analysis, which the philosopher performs, language is the focal object. Language is the domain of propositions and according to Wittgenstein, there are fundamentally two types of propositions; those that are true for all possible states of affairs, and those that are pictures of reality. The propositions of logic and pure mathematics, which are called tautologies, belong to the first group and they give no information about the world. On the other hand, the propositions that picture or represent possible states of affair in the world are either true or false. We compare them with reality. They tell us something about the world. They do that with their structure. As mentioned above, they are either true or false. According to Wittgenstein the totality of true propositions constitutes the propositions of natural sciences.

Wittgenstein categorically affirms that apart from these two, there is no other class of propositions. There are no philosophical or metaphysical propositions. He thus views language as the totality of propositions. He says that a proposition is a picture of reality, for I know the state of affairs presented by it, if I understand the proposition. Hence there is a very

intimate relationship between language and reality. He asserts that the picture is linked with reality as it reaches up to it. It is like a scale applied to reality. Every picture should correspond to reality and there are no pictures which are *a priori* true.

The most important feature of a picture or a proposition is its sense. According to Wittgenstein, every picture represents its sense and whether a proposition is true or false is decided on the basis of the agreement or disagreement of its sense with reality. The picture theory of meaning is introduced in this context. According to Wittgenstein, the propositional sign consists in the fact that its elements, the words, are combined in it in a definite way. (TLP. 3.14). Hence it exhibits a definite structure and order. In other words, the proposition is not just a mixture of words, just as the musical theme is not a mixture of tones. He argues that only facts can express a sense, a class of names cannot. This also points to the importance of structure.

The proposition is a picture of reality, asserts Wittgenstein. Hence in propositions thoughts can be so expressed that, to the objects of the thoughts correspond the elements of the propositional sign. (TLP. 3.2) This affirms the picturing relationship language has with the world. In other words, there is a structural isomorphism between language and world. In language we have names, which stand for the objects in the world. He asserts that the name means the object in the world and the object is the meaning of the word in language. (TLP. 3.203) According to Wittgenstein, to the configuration of the simple signs in the propositional sign corresponds the configuration of the objects in the state of affairs. (3.21) A proposition in language is thus a picture of a fact in the world and language can picture facts because it can articulate their structure. Propositions in language do this by articulating how objects are correlated in the world. The elements of picture correspond to the objects in facts. In the proposition there must be exactly as many things distinguishable as there are in the state of affairs, which it represents (4.04). In this way the propositional structure corresponds to the structure of the fact. This structural isomorphism makes the former a picture of the latter.

The picturing relationship of language with the world is central to Wittgenstein's conception of language and philosophy in the TLP. The picture, which is a proposition, presents the facts in logical space, which is the existence and non-existence of atomic facts. (TLP. 2.11). The following propositions of the TLP further affirm the picturing relationship.

2.12 The picture is a model of reality.

- 2.13 To the objects correspond in the picture the elements of the picture.
- 2.131 The elements of the picture stand, in the picture, for the objects.
- 2.14 The picture consists in the fact that its elements are combined with one another in a definite way.
- 2.141 The picture is a fact.
- 2.15 That the elements of the picture are combined with one another in a definite way, represents that the things are so combined with one another.

The Structure of Proposition and Picturing

Wittgenstein holds that a proposition about a complex stands in internal relation to the proposition about its constituent part. This affirms the picturing relationship language has with reality. A proposition, which is a picture, stands for a fact or a state of affairs in logical space. Wittgenstein affirms that the picture contains the possibility of the state of affairs which it represents (2.203). All pictures may not agree with what is the case in reality. One may assert that the cat is on the table, while the cat actually is on the mat. Yet it is a picture, as the proposition, “the cat is on the mat” is a possible state of affair. It is a picture, and therefore, a sensible proposition, but a false one. On the basis of a proposition’s agreement with reality we judge it as either true or false, either right or wrong. (2.21)

Propositions are linguistic expressions that have sense. The sense of a proposition depends on the state of affair it actually or possibly represents. In other words, the sense of a proposition consists in the picturing relationship it has with the world. Hence we may say that a picture or proposition represents its sense. (2.221)

The picture theory not only elucidates the nature and structure of propositions which are pictures of reality, but also enlightens us about the limits of language. Wittgenstein says that a proposition presents the existence and non-existence of atomic facts (4.1). Here Wittgenstein holds that not all propositions are true, or not all propositions represent actual state of affair in the world. But some of them represent actual facts and hence are true. Wittgenstein adds that, the totality of true propositions constitute the totality of the natural sciences (4.11). All sensible propositions are therefore, either true or false, depending on whether they correspond to actual state of affairs or not. All those propositions that fail to picture a fact in the world are neither true nor false, but are nonsensical.

This enlightens us about the limits of language. Wittgenstein says that the limits of my language mean the limits of my world (5.6). All those propositions that are neither tautologies nor pictures of the world are nonsensical. The so called metaphysical propositions are examples. For instance, when we say, “God is omnipresent”, we do not assert any fact in the world, as the constituents of the statement do not correspond to any objects in the world and hence their constitution does not articulate anything meaningfully. They neither represent the world nor do they articulate any necessary truths. It is not possible to think about anything that contradicts the laws of logic. He argues that, “to present in language anything which “contradicts logic” is as impossible as in geometry to present by its co-ordinates a figure which contradicts the laws of space; or to give the co-ordinates of a point which does not exist.” (3.032)

Limits of the World: The Transcendental

One section of the *TLP* is dedicated to the logical and structural relationship between language and reality. It deals with what can be said. But *TLP* is also concerned with what cannot be said. This realm of the unsayable is rather more important than what is sayable. Wittgenstein says that there are things that cannot be said but only be shown. The metaphysical subject is such an entity. This subject is different from the empirical self, which is a part of the world. This subject does not belong to the world but it is the limit of the world. He says that the “I” occurs in philosophy through the fact that the “world is my world”. The philosophical I is not the man, asserts Wittgenstein, it is not the human body or the human soul which psychology treats, but the metaphysical subject, the limit—not a part of the world.

The role of philosophy is also peculiar. Wittgenstein says that philosophy is not one of the natural sciences. According to him, the word “philosophy” must mean something which stands above or below, but not beside the natural sciences. He maintains that the object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts. (*TLP*. 4.112). It is not a theory but an activity. For him a typical philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations and hence the result of philosophy is not a number of “philosophical propositions”. It rather makes those propositions clear. It should make clear and delimit sharply the thoughts which otherwise are, as it were, opaque and blurred.

This logical clarification of language ultimately suggests that philosophy has no role to play in developing theories of any sort that deal with the ultimate nature of things and their essential relationships. It affirms that philosophy cannot deal with those issues. Nor can it

address the problems of life. The logical analysis reveals that ultimately the so-called problems of life are not genuine problems and hence it is not possible to find answers to them. This is not to deny the significance and value to things that are not empirical (as the logical positivists did it). Wittgenstein only says that philosophy, as a critique of language cannot say anything about it.

After providing such elucidations about the nature and function of philosophy, Wittgenstein says that, philosophy is not intended to solve the problems of life. Nor can it do that. It only shows that they are not genuine problems that can have solutions.

Quiz

1. According to Wittgenstein, the main point of his book *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* is?
[a] Logical [b] Ethical [c] Linguistic [d] Syntactical.
2. Philosophy, which is a critique of language, brings out of linguistic expressions.
[a] Grammatical structure [b] Semantic content [c] Logical structure [d] Real ideas that lie behind.
3. The problems of philosophy are posed as a result of
[a] Our metaphysical propensities [b] The misunderstanding of the syntactical structure of language [c] The unintelligibility of linguistic expressions [d] The misunderstanding of the logic of language.
4. What is philosophy according to Wittgenstein?
[a] An activity of language analysis [b] An analysis of reality [c] A theory of the world and language [d] A doctrine of the self.
5. According to Wittgenstein, an object is the?
[a] Sense of the word [b] Meaning of the word [c] Component of the world [d] Essence of the word.

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [c]
3. [d]
4. [a]
5. [b]

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Chapter 30

Wittgenstein: Language-Games and Forms of Life

Key Words: **Key Words:** Family resemblance, meaning as use, forms of life, language games, meaning, private language, rule-following.

This chapter discusses the important features of Wittgenstein's later philosophy. As we have seen in the previous chapter, after writing the *TLP*, where he outlined a very peculiar conception of philosophy—which conceived philosophical problems as pseudo problems, which have no solutions—Wittgenstein left philosophy, concluding that all the important issues with regard to philosophy are resolved and there was nothing more to be explored. But later he changed his mind. After engaging himself with many things, including the vocation of a school teacher in Norway, Wittgenstein returned to Cambridge and to philosophy in 1929 and till 1935 he entertained very unconventional ideas about philosophy. This period was also a transitional period in his intellectual life. The important concerns of these days include philosophy of mathematics, language and meaning, psychological concepts, and the concept of knowledge.

An important work during this period is *Philosophische Bemerkungen* (English translation *Philosophical Remarks*) written in 1932, but published posthumously in 1964. Afterwards the *Philosophische Grammatik* (English: *Philosophical Grammar*) was written, which questions the view that understanding language is a mental process. The idea of family resemblance which occupies a central place in his later works, particularly the *Philosophical Investigations* makes its first appearance in *Philosophical Grammar*. Another important work during this period is *The Blue Book*, which refers to the theory of meaning as use, which is central to his later philosophy.

View of Language in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy

During his later period, Wittgenstein rejects what constitutes the core of his early view about language; the picturing relationship. Consequently, he also opposes the view that language has only one logic, or there is only one single essence of language. Instead he emphasizes the diverse and multiple ways in which we use language. Accordingly he holds that, meaning does not consist in the picturing relation between

propositions and facts, but in the use of an expression in the multiplicity of practices, which go to make up language.

As mentioned above, according to this later view, we will not be able to discover a single essence of language, as the latter is intrinsically connected with all human activities and behaviour, our practical affairs and relations, personal and public activities, relationship with others and the world. In other words, it is related to the diverse forms of life in which we participate as human beings living in a society. Despite the obvious differences from his early view, the later philosophy shares with the former certain common features concerning the nature of philosophy. In the *Tractates*, Wittgenstein rejected many traditional conceptions about the nature and function of philosophy and held that, philosophy is not a theory or a science. He was of the opinion that philosophy does not propose any theories, nor does it solve any problems, but is only a critique of language. In his later period also he subscribed to some extremely unconventional views about philosophy. Here too he held that philosophical problems are not empirical problems and rejected the possibility of formulating philosophical theories and conceiving it as a science. Here he proposes that, philosophical problems are solved by looking into the workings of our language. He believes that philosophical problems will vanish when the workings of language are properly grasped. His latter view holds that, in philosophy we should not seek to explain but only to *describe*.

Again, his early view of conceiving language as a representation of reality is replaced in favour of a notion that emphasizes on the diversity of uses language has in our life. Here Wittgenstein no longer advocates the idea that language has a universal logical structure. The idea of meaning he advocates in the early thought, which holds that a name stands for an object, and language as a whole is a picture of the world is replaced with the notion that meaning of a word is its use in the language.

Though Wittgenstein continues to preoccupy himself with language, the later view does not conceive language as a field of inquiry in its own right. He now holds that philosophical problems arise when we use language in inappropriate and unusual manners. But here too he believes that much of our confusions and riddles are the result of the misuse of language. One may wonder why there is a breakdown of the machinery of language, as Wittgenstein conceives the ordinary use of language is a domain which does not generate any such problems. Certain other questions like,

“What is language?”, “Does language have an essence?” and “What is meaning and is it the essence of language?” can also be raised in this context.

The Concept of Meaning

Contrary to the early view, Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* (PI) holds that every word is not a name and the object corresponding to the word is not the meaning of the word. Wittgenstein writes:

Let us first discuss *this* point of the argument: that a word has no meaning if nothing corresponds to it.—It is important to not that the word "meaning" is being used illicitly if it is used to signify the thing that 'corresponds' to the word. That is to confound the meaning; of a name with the *bearer* of the name. When Mr. N. N. dies one says that the bearer of the name dies, not that the meaning dies. And it would be nonsensical to say that, for if the name ceased to have meaning it would make no sense to say "Mr. N. N. is dead." [PI: 40]

Wittgenstein now claims that the concept of meaning is related to the public practice of utterance, and all that makes this practice possible. Hence it is not just a logical exercise, which relies on abstract and a priori norms, but a dynamically interactive process which relates individuals with each other and their natural and artificial environments.

Different people employ language for different ends. Scientists, poets, politicians, engineers, workers etc. all employ language and conduct their lives through it. Hence it is the instrument of human purposes and needs. The philosopher's concern is with the instrument, with language, where he examines the workings of language. Wittgenstein opposes the possibility of arriving at a unitary account of language, which explains the whole working of a language in terms of a single theoretical model. He attempted something similar during his early period, where he envisaged discovering the essence of language by exploring its logical structure. On the other hand, the later view conceives language as a multiplicity of different activities. It thus opposes a theory of language which was subscribed to by the *Tractatus* and many other mistaken views about language.

The *Philosophical Investigations* discusses many such views of language, which Wittgenstein holds as mistaken in his later period. It begins with a critique on

Augustine's conception of language, which is a commonly held view and which is very close to the *Tractatus's* view. According to this view, the essence of language lies beneath the surface and this hidden essence needs to be discovered by means of the analysis of language. Hence this view holds that there is something like a final analysis of our forms of language. This view also holds that the major function of language is representation of reality. Again since it believes that the learning of a language is done by making associations between words and objects, it is possible to have a private language, as such associations are made privately by each individual. The *PI* opposes all these views and presents a very different idea about the nature and philosophical significance of language. He thus advocated a unique conception of philosophy, which had exerted tremendous influence on the development of 20th century and contemporary European philosophy.

As mentioned above, the *PI* starts with an examination of Augustine's conception of language, where each word's meaning is fixed to an object and one learns language by learning to associate words with things, which are their meanings. Opposing this view, which is closer to his own view held in the *TLP*, Wittgenstein proclaims that language is not one uniform thing, defined in terms of an essence or universal logical structure. Instead, it is a host of different activities, as we use language to do many things in life. Wittgenstein here introduces the simile of games in order to elucidate this aspect. He compares these different activities with different games we play in language. The concept of language-games is introduced in order to account for the multiplicity of uses and the relationship with the different contexts of their uses.

Again, Wittgenstein subscribes to a view which identifies language with an essential human capacity or potential. He says that language belongs as much to our natural history as walking, eating or drinking. It is part of the social behaviour of the species and it evolves like an institution with the various things we do with it. We employ language for different purposes for carrying out the various life activities in different situations and circumstances. Hence the background of human requirements in the natural environment has a vital role in the evolution of Language.

As mentioned above, the approach in the later period is characteristically different from the early philosophy of the *TLP*. Instead of looking for the essence or universal structure of language, Wittgenstein here focuses on its ordinary functioning. He examines how language normally functions in the various contexts in which people actually employ it; for narrating, questioning, describing, preying, expressing gratitude or anger, reporting, affirming or denying etc. we have to examine how people use them in these contexts. "Do not explain, just see how it actually works, as meanings have to be found in its use", says Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein's method consists in invoking certain artificial examples of patterns of linguistic activity. For example, he analyses the language of the builder and his assistant, as an elementary model of a working language. The builder makes some utterances which in other contexts need not make any sense. He but perfectly communicates with his assistant, as both of them are conversant in the language game they participate. Both of them know the rules to be followed and they hardly make mistakes. Certain utterances of the builder evoke definite forms of responses in the assistant in a particular context. They both have no doubts about what is stated and what is expected to be done.

Wittgenstein here compares language use with a game. The participants in a conversation are compared to players who perform certain tasks and make certain types of moves based on certain rules that are publically agreed upon. The context in which people use language is crucial here, as the rules as well as the game change according to the context. The things participants do and achieve by engaging in conversation have to be examined and Wittgenstein says that we here come across the immense diversity exhibited by our usages. Wittgenstein adds:

But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command?—There are *countless* kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call "symbols", "words", "sentences". And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. Here the term "*language-game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. [PI 23]

Language-games

Wittgenstein conceives language by comparing it with a toolbox. In a toolbox there are several tools like the hammer, square and gluepot. Similarly words have a multiplicity of different uses. He gives examples of primitive forms of languages and calls them language-games. We have already cited the example of the language game of the builder and his assistant. He also cites the example of a child learning the usage of words. Such primitive forms of languages are cited in order to remove the mental mist surrounding our ordinary usage of language. In such primitive forms thinking appears less confusing. Wittgenstein points out that these simple primitive forms are not completely different from the complex natural languages, as they are only different in kind. They help us to understand how our language functions.

Wittgenstein repeatedly asserts the diversity of language use depending on the contexts in which we employ them. Unlike his early view which looked for the universal structure of all linguistic expressions, here he emphasizes on diversity and conceives the early approach as an instance of craving for generality. This tendency to search for the common essence of all expressions is a metaphysical concern, as it seeks to identify the common feature of all particulars of the same kind. The metaphysical notion of the general idea originates from this concern.

This metaphysical propensity often construes that the meaning of the word is an image or a thing correlated to that word. This is to associate meaning with an extralinguistic entity, which is either physical or mental. According to this view, words are proper names and we confuse the bearer of the name with the meaning of the name. Wittgenstein reminds us that there is something fundamentally wrong about this craving for generality. He argues that not all meaningful uses of language are meaningful in the same way and not all words are names. To elucidate this point further, he cites the example of the name of a person. We have seen this above. According to Wittgenstein, the thing or person that is the bearer of the name is not the meaning of the name. As he says, when a person named Mr. N.N. dies, we say that, such and such a person had died or the bearer of the name Mr. N.N. died and not the meaning of the expression Mr. N.N. died.

The craving for generality had resulted in many metaphysical confusions and has generated many philosophical problems. For instance, the problems related to abstractions (abstract entities) and mental representation. As a result we assume that there is a separate and hidden realm of reality, where we encounter the meaning of words. Countering this approach, Wittgenstein urges us to look how these words are used in actual language. The idea of language games elucidates this further. Wittgenstein says:

Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,— but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language". [PI : 65]

There are different things we designate as games. For example, there are board games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games etc. Wittgenstein argues that, if we seek to know what is common to all these different types of games, we have nothing specific to point out. There are some similarities, as in some games we use balls, some are played indoor, some are played individually and some others in groups. For instance, both football and volleyball games use balls. But the ways they are used are different. There are of course some similarities, but there are also important differences between each game. These similarities do not warrant us to identify the "essence" of all games. Wittgenstein characterizes such similarities as family resemblances, indicating that they are comparable to the resemblances between the different members of the same family. Some may have similar noses and some others may have similar foreheads and so on and so forth. But such similarities and resemblances do not warrant us to construe an essence. In Wittgenstein's own words:

And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.

The diverse ways in which we use it makes it impossible to identify a single essence. It is a rule-governed activity that cannot be defined in exact terms. It lacks exact boundaries and hence the same concept may have a range of different applications in our use. The meaning and significance of linguistic usages depend on the context of life of their application. Here Wittgenstein introduces the notion of "form of life." According to him, every form of life is a context of life where people are bound to each

other and to the life context by means of conventions and rules. The metaphor of game helps us to understand this aspect. Let us take the example of a game of chess. Here simply naming the various pawns is not enough. One has to learn how the figures can move on the chessboard. This is to know about the rules of the game of chess, which actually regulate these movements. The core of Wittgenstein's argument consists in the assertion that meanings are hidden. They are not to be found in any curious unknown territory; in the mind or in a supra-natural realm. Instead, they have to be located in the day-to-day usages. Wittgenstein argues that, like games, the rules of language use are also public, conventional and customary. These rules are regulative mechanism of a community. People follow them, without contemplating about them or raising questions or doubts about their legitimacy. Wittgenstein says that "obeying a rule" is a practice. We learn a rule by following it and by participating in the form of life. Wittgenstein categorically affirms that rules cannot be observed privately, as they presuppose a context of life, which is public.

The Concept of Private Language

Since words acquire meanings in the public activity of using them, language is essentially a public activity. Wittgenstein thus opposes the idea of a private language. The idea of a private language, where a person expresses his inner experiences like feelings, moods etc. which he alone can understand is contested here. The individual words of this language are said to be referring to private sensations, which the person who has them alone can understand.

Countering this view, Wittgenstein asks; how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations? He considers the word "pain", which actually is a private sensation. Now assume that he gives a name to his private sensation, which he alone can relate to the latter. Wittgenstein here reminds that when someone gives a name to his sensation, we should not forget that a great deal of stage- setting in the language is presupposed. Only then the act of naming makes sense. Wittgenstein says that when someone indicates a private sensation he has with a word and notes down this word whenever he has that sensation, that word lacks any meaning. This is because, though a note has a function and therefore, a definite meaning, the note this person makes when he has a private sensation, which no one else understands, has no meaning, because unlike usual notes people make, this note does not have a function

in the public activity of using language. A word, which we use to indicate a sensation, should be intelligible to others as well, and not just to the user alone. The use of a word for that person's sensation stands in need of a justification which everybody understands. It becomes a note only when it is used according to certain rules which are public. In other words, it is the rule-governed act that makes such moves significant and meaningful. Wittgenstein continues:

And it would not help either to say that it need not be a sensation; that when he writes "S", he has something—and that is all that can be said. "Has" and "something" also belong to our common language.—So in the end when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound.—But such a sound is an expression only as it occurs in a particular language-game, which should now be described. [PI: 261]

Wittgenstein underlines that language is a public and socially-governed activity and therefore, a rule governed activity. Linguistic expressions and usages make sense only if they are used in a rule governed manner. This shift to rule-governing act emphasizes the importance of publically shared intersubjective conventions in the formation and evolution of human languages. Wittgenstein here does not discuss the logic of language, as he did in the *TLP*, but instead focuses on the grammar of language that constitutes the norms for meaningful language use. With this emphasis on grammar he highlights the phenomenon of rule-following that humans observe when they communicate with each other in their day to day life.

The Role of Philosophy

Wittgenstein says that the typical philosophical problems that are commonly found in the history of philosophy, are the result of linguistic confusions. They arise when we use language not in the usual sense in which it is used. Wittgenstein says that philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday. They originate when language is used in an unusual sense.

But philosophy has a positive and an important role to play as well. Here his view resembles his earlier view, which conceived philosophy as a critique of language and treated its major function as a logical analysis that leads to logical clarification. Here too he says that philosophy helps us to get rid of our confusions and the idea of language analysis is crucial here as well. But here philosophy brings out the

confusions, not by the logical analysis of propositions but by pointing to the reality of language, which consists in its use in ordinary life.

The new approach to language analysis urges to do away with all explanation, and description alone must take its place. Here too philosophy is not a science and hence does not give rise to theories. It has an entirely different function. Wittgenstein writes:

Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.—Since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain. For what is hidden, for example, is of no interest to us. One might also give the name "philosophy" to what is possible before all new discoveries and inventions.

The work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose. [127]

Hence, philosophical problems are not treated as empirical problems that can be solved adopting a definite methodology. Wittgenstein says that, philosophical problems are solved by looking into the workings of our language. Philosophy makes us recognize those workings of our language, despite of an urge to misunderstand them. He asserts that the problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known.[*PI*: 109]

Quiz

1. Which does Wittgenstein not hold in his later period?
(a) Philosophical problems are solved by looking into the workings of our language
(b) philosophical problems are solved by a logical analysis of language
(c) Philosophical problems will vanish when the workings of language are properly grasped (d) Philosophy we should not seek to explain but only to *describe*.
2. Which of the following is held by the Augustinian view of language?
(a) Essence of language lies beneath the surface (b) Meaning of a word is determined by the context in which it is used (c) Language is not one uniform thing (d) Language has a universal logical structure.
3. Which of the following does Wittgenstein's later philosophy hold?
(a) Philosophy consists in the logical clarification of language (b) Philosophy deals with the theories of linguistic understanding (c) Philosophy explains the nature of the world and language (d) Philosophy neither explains nor deduces anything but simply puts everything before us.
4. Why did Wittgenstein reject the possibility of private language?
(a) Because we can never express our inner experiences (b) Because we can never name a private sensation (c) Because there is no one to one correspondence between word and meaning (d) Because words acquire meanings in the public activity of using them.
5. The model of language analysis in Wittgenstein's later work emphasizes on:

(a) Philosophical problems are treated as empirical problems (b) The logical analysis of propositions (c) Doing away with all explanation (d) Arriving at a scientific conception of language.

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [a]
3. [d]
4. [d]
5. [c]

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Chapter 31

Logical Positivism and the Scientific Conception of Philosophy

Key Words:

Vienna circle, verification principle, positivism, tautologies, factual propositions, language analysis, rejection of metaphysics, practical verifiability, verifiable in principle, strong verifiability, weak verifiability, unified science

This chapter discusses one of the very significant developments the 20th century European philosophy has witnessed; logical positivism, which is also known as neo empiricism. Again, like many other such initiatives in philosophy like existentialism, logical positivism is not a school of philosophy, with certain central doctrine, a definite conception of reality or a theory of knowledge. It is rather a movement that reflects the dominant scientific outlook of 20th century European civilization and its extension to all spheres of life. The logical positivists thus advocated a unique conception of knowledge which considered the scientific model as paradigm. They thus opposed metaphysics which aims at going beyond the sensible world and contemplating about transcendental realities. According to them metaphysics is a bad science. They were tremendously influenced by many philosophical approaches, notably, the positivism of Augustin Comte, the logical atomism of Bertrand Russell, and most significantly, by the peculiar conception of language and meaning developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his early work, the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*.

The fact that almost all major advancements in knowledge have been in the field of natural sciences have prompted the logical positivists to consider scientific conception of knowledge as paradigmatic. They found that the theories of speculative philosophy advocated by different thinkers were merely personal interpretations about reality. Most importantly, these theories were not empirically verifiable and hence it is impossible to establish their truth or falsity. The logical positivists affirm that these theories are not more than poetical or emotional reactions to the world and none of them represent knowledge like science. On the other hand, science

provides a totally different picture. It approaches reality and life from a different perspective. The story of humanity has never been the same after enlightenment, which had witnessed the emergence of modern science. Ever since renaissance and scientific revolution happened in modern Europe, the applied sciences have tremendously changed human life.

Following Wittgenstein who declared that philosophy is not a science, and there are no philosophical theories, the logical positivists too have affirmed that philosophy does not contribute to the increase of human knowledge. 20th century philosophy was characteristically different from the philosophical thinking of early centuries. Earlier, philosophy was the handmaid of theology and with the civilization turning more and more towards science, the 20th century philosophy has become a handmaid of science. In this context, the major task of philosophy consists in the logical clarification of language. The philosopher is concerned with the clarification of the meaning of words and is also keen to show what words denote in terms of immediate experience.

Logical positivism was a prominent philosophical initiative that took 20th century thinking in this direction. There are several factors—historical, cultural, intellectual—that contributed to the development of logical positivism. We shall now examine some of them.

The Emergence of Logical Positivism

After the World War I, a group of intellectuals comprising of mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers, began meeting in Vienna under the leadership of the German philosopher and physicist, Moritz Schlick. They primarily discussed the implications of recent developments in logic initiated by many thinkers like Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein. The advancements modern science made too had impressed them. They began contemplating about the possibility of a systematic reduction of human knowledge to logical and scientific foundations, as they believed, science alone is capable of providing universal and certain knowledge. Since they were guided by the methodological approaches adopted by the natural sciences, they emphasized materialism, empiricism, philosophical naturalism and the scientific method. The most notable members of the Vienna Circle were Moritz Schlick, Hans Reichenbach, Rudolf Carnap, Herbert Feigl,

Philipp Frank, Kurt Grelling, Hans Hahn, Carl Gustav Hempel, Victor Kraft, Otto Neurath and Friedrich Waismann.

Logical Positivism formally began in 1929 with the publication of a manifesto entitled *The Vienna Circle; Its Scientific Outlook*, jointly written by Carnap, Neurath and Hahn. This pamphlet gave a brief account of the philosophical position of the thinkers associated with the group and a review of the problems in the philosophy of mathematics and of the physical and social sciences that they were chiefly concerned to solve. One of the most important features of logical positivism was the advocacy of the principle of verification, which states that, in order to be meaningful a statement needs to be empirically verifiable, though ironically, this statement itself is not verifiable.

As mentioned above, the logical positivists were influenced by many factors that contributed in determining the social and cultural life of 20th century Europe. One of the primary influences was the empiricism of Hume, Comte, Mill, Avenarius and Mach. The modern developments in formal logic were another significant intellectual inspiration as the logical techniques developed by Frege, Peano and Russell were widely employed by the logical positivists in their analysis of language. Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum mechanics were other factors that influenced their thinking. But the single most important influence was Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, to which they developed their own unique reading and interpretation.

The logical positivists adopted uncompromising positivism and proposed a blanket rejection of metaphysics. They had immense respect for scientific method and logical analysis, and they believed that in so far as philosophical problems are genuine at all they can be definitely solved by logical analysis. Being faithful to the empiricist tradition, it was natural for the logical positivists to be influenced by the radical empiricist philosophy of David Hume. Subsequently, they have rearticulated Hume's division of Relations of Ideas and Matters of Facts as tautologies and factual propositions. They maintain that all sensible propositions fall under these two categories. Therefore, according to the logical positivists sentences that are neither tautologies nor factual are not propositions. The theory of verifiability is proposed in this context, which came to be identified as the hallmark feature of the logical positivists.

Logical Positivism and the Question of Meaning

Like many others who consider language analysis constituting the core of philosophy, the logical positivists too have treated language analysis as vital. According to them, there are different types of meaningful statements. There are analytic a priori statements that are true or false by virtue of their meaning or logical form. When the truth and falsity of statements are ascertained by experience, they are known as synthetic a posteriori. Therefore, they contend that the meaning of a proposition is known if we know the method by means of which we verify it. In other words, we know the meaning if we know the conditions under which the statement is true or false. This is the celebrated verification principle. Logical positivists carry out their rejection of metaphysics by employing the verification principle as a criterion for meaningfulness. Metaphysical propositions, obviously are not verifiable, as they are not about what is the case in the world.

Subsequently, they argue that many metaphysical utterances are due to the commission of logical errors. They begin their analysis with an examination of statements that express the so-called metaphysical truths. They explore from what premises the metaphysicians deduce their propositions, as they too need to begin, as other men do, with the evidence of their senses. Accordingly, the logical positivists wonder what valid process of reasoning can possibly lead the metaphysicians to the conception of a transcendent reality. As A. J. Ayer says, the traditional disputes of philosophers are, for the most part, as unwarranted as they are unfruitful. He then asserts that the surest way to end them is to establish beyond question 'what should be the purpose and method of a philosophical inquiry?' [*Language Truth and Logic*, p.1]

Rejection of Metaphysics and Language Analysis

The logical positivists reject metaphysics in a characteristically different manner than many others who ventured doing so. For instance, Immanuel Kant had demonstrated that metaphysics as a science is impossible. He treated the impossibility of metaphysics as a matter of fact and he attempted to draw a limit to our thinking. On the other hand, Wittgenstein, who followed a method rooted in language analysis attempts to draw the line in language. He maintains that, in order to draw a limit to thinking, as Kant did, we should have to think both sides of this limit, which is absurd. Following Wittgenstein, the logical positivists too try to demonstrate the

impossibility of transcendent metaphysics, not as a matter of fact, but as a matter of logic. They intend to show how metaphysics is impossible by a criticism of the nature of the actual statements which comprise metaphysics. Applying the verification principle as a criterion for meaningfulness they assert that statements that transcend the limits of all possible sense experience have no literal significance. As the so-called metaphysical propositions transcend such limits, they are bound to be meaningless.

As mentioned above, the rule which determines the literal significance of language is the criterion for meaningfulness. But metaphysicians produce sentences, which fail to conform to the conditions under which alone a sentence can be literally significant. About the peculiar feature that makes the approach of the logical positivists different from others who oppose metaphysics, A.J. Ayer observes:

The originality of the logical positivists lay in their making the impossibility of metaphysics depend not upon the nature of what could be known but upon the nature of what could be said. Their charge against the metaphysician was that he breaks the rules which any utterance must satisfy if it is to be literally significant. [*Logical Positivism*, p.11]

The logical positivists thus maintain that all propositions about God or absolute, transcendent entities, substance, destiny of man, meaning of human life, goodness etc. are metaphysical. These propositions look like other meaningful propositions that are about matters of fact. They pretend to be cognitive. But with a language analysis rooted in the principle of verifiability, the logical positivists affirm that they are actually literal nonsense and meaningless, though they may have emotive or poetic value.

Employing the method of the logical analysis of language in order to demonstrate the meaninglessness of metaphysical propositions, the logical positivists were influenced by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein talks about those elementary propositions which a logical analysis of language may expose. These elementary propositions have direct correspondence with facts. They are direct reports of observation and hence are the touchstones by reference to which all other statements were empirically verified.

We may need to examine a little more the important features of the principle of verification in this context. As indicated above, this principle asserts that the meaning of a proposition is its method of verification. Therefore, verification is the criterion by which we test whether a sentence expresses a genuine proposition about a matter of fact. They argue that all meaningful statements can be ultimately analyzed to the elementary statements which stand for observable events. This is applicable to the most abstract scientific hypotheses as well.

According to A.J. Ayer, the principle of verification affirms that a sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express - that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept the proposition as being true, or reject it as being false. Ayer discusses different types of verification such as practical verifiability, verifiable in principle, strong verifiability and weak verifiability. Practical verifiability is possible in the case of propositions which can be confirmed as either true or false on the basis of actual observations. On the other hand, those propositions for which we do not have a practical means of verification may still be meaningful if we can theoretically verify them.

The criterion of strong verification insists that a statement is meaningful if and only if, its truth could be conclusively established in experience. But such a strong criterion becomes difficult to hold as many statements we hold as true like all men are mortal, and bodies expand when heated, are not verifiable in the strong sense. Such general propositions of law are designed to cover an infinite number of cases. They are therefore, not conclusively verified. On the other hand, the criterion of weak verification states that a statement is meaningful if it is possible for experience to render it probable. The important question in this context is, “would any observations be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood?” In the weak sense a genuine factual proposition need not be equivalent to an experiential proposition, or any finite number of experiential propositions. It only says that if some experiential propositions can be deduced from it in conjunction with certain other premises without being deducible from those other premises alone, then it is meaningful.

The very idea of conceiving verifiability as a criterion for meaningfulness encounters several difficulties. The idea of verifiability is based on the notion of elementary statements which are

direct observation statements. But these elementary statements themselves are not infallible, as they may not refer to anything other than the private sensations of the speaker. They may not be anything more than mere records of the subject's immediate experiences. Again, an overemphasis on observation may pose the threat of solipsism as well. A transition from the subject's private experiences to the experiences of others and to the public world is always problematic. Ironically, as mentioned above, the principle of verification is not itself verifiable.

Logical Positivism and the Idea of Unified Science

The logical positivists have advocated an idea of unified science, which affirms that all genuine knowledge can be equated with scientific knowledge. They thought that they could materialize the unity of all sciences by developing a common language in which all scientific propositions can be expressed. All knowledge can be codified in a single standard language of science. This is done by carrying out several reductions or explications of the terms employed in the language to more fundamental expressions that stand for observations.

The logical positivists maintain that scientific theory represents an axiomatic system, which is not directly verifiable. It is an abstract formal system. Any empirical interpretation is possible only by means of those statements that establish a correlation between real objects and the abstract concepts. Scientific theory needs such rules of correspondence for empirical interpretation and verification. The language of scientific theory, according to the logical positivists, consists of three types of terms: logical, observational and theoretical. While logical terms form logical statements, the observational statements are formed out of logical terms and observational terms. Theoretical statements are formed out of theoretical terms and logical terms. The logical positivists thus hold that all sciences share a common language and all scientific terms could be restated as, or reduced to, a set of basic statements, or protocol sentences, describing immediate experience or perception. In other words, the logical positivists envisage a reduction of all scientific terms into terms of physics. They argue that the procedures for testing statements in the various sciences are basically the same.

Inspired by Wittgenstein, the logical positivists argue that the primary function of philosophy is not to propose basic principles of knowledge. Philosophy does not aim at constructing a deductive system of meaningful propositions by offering the consequences of basic principles of knowledge as a complete picture of reality. They affirm that philosophy clarifies the logical relations of empirical propositions.

Like most other philosophical movements, historical and cultural factors have played a crucial role in the emergence of logical positivism. The beginning of 20th century was an era of reason and scientific rationality. The impact of scientific developments in philosophy has inspired many thinkers to conceive a philosophy also as a scientific; a scientific philosophy. They have adopted the method of rigorous logical and linguistic analysis for this purpose and combined with it the spirit of empiricism and positivism.

Though the logical positivists have generated a lot of interest from different quarters, they failed to sustain and consolidate as a movement. Their theories derived a lot from the thoughts of Russell and Wittgenstein. Yet neither of them have associated themselves with the movement. Wittgenstein was even critical about their project and has complained that they have misunderstood his philosophy. They have attracted criticism from later philosophers of analytic philosophy like Hilary Putnam and W.V. Quine. Putnam has demonstrated that the distinction the logical positivists made between "observational" and "theoretical" statements is meaningless. W. V. Quine has criticized the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, and the reduction of meaningful statements to immediate experience. Further Thomas Kuhn has demonstrated the impossibility of providing truth conditions for science, independent of its historical paradigm.

Quiz

1. According to the logical positivists, which of the following was not a reason for rejecting metaphysics?
 - (a) Metaphysical theories are proved to be false
 - (b) They are not empirically verifiable
 - (c) They are not more than poetical or emotional reactions to the world
 - (d) They are not more than mere personal interpretations about reality.
2. All the following have influenced the logical positivists, except?

- (a) Empiricism (b) Modern developments in formal logic (c) Idealism
(d) Developments in modern science.
3. According to the logical positivists, which type of statements are true or false by virtue of their meaning or logical form?
(a) Analytic a priori (b) Syhtnetic a priori (c) Synthetic a posteriori (d) None of the above.
4. According to the logical positivists, on what does the impossibility of metaphysics depend upon?
(a) On the nature of what could be known (b) On the nature of what could be imagined
(c) On the nature of what could be contemplated (d) On the nature of what could be said.
5. According to the logical positivists metaphysical statements are not.....
(a) Proved to be false (b) Literal nonsense (c) Meaningless (d) Have only emotive value.

Answer Key

1. [a]
2. [c]
3. [a]
4. [d]
5. [a]

Assignments

1. Discuss the way in which logical positivists have rejected metaphysics, bringing out its peculiar features.
2. Describe the theory of meaning advocated by the logical positivists.

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Chapter 32

Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology: The Principle of Intentionality and the Methods of Reduction

Key Words:

presuppositionless philosophy, consciousness, phenomena, intentionality principle, intentional in-existence, essences, natural attitude, bracketing, *Epoche*, phenomenological-psychological reduction, eidetic reduction, transcendental reduction, transcendental ego.

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is widely known as the founder of modern phenomenology, a highly influential movement in 20th century western philosophy. Husserl was one of the prominent European thinkers of 20th century and the movement has inspired thinkers from different streams. Though we consider Husserl as the founder of phenomenology, the approach and method we call as phenomenological are not his exclusive invention. Many thinkers and philosophers like Kant, Fichte, Hegel and Mach have referred to the term phenomenology in their writings before Husserl used it in a more systematic way. But it was Husserl who developed it into a systematic philosophical approach and method with certain definite goals. All major contributions in this area are from Edmund Husserl in whose writings it appears as a philosophy and as a method. Husserl further conceived phenomenology as a foundational science and as a presuppositionless philosophy.

Husserl was primarily a mathematician and logician. He was the student of the great German philosopher and psychologist Franz Brentano, who had famously reintroduced the intentionality principle. Husserl was also influenced by the empiricism of David Hume. He found the predominant naturalism and historicism in German thought objectionable and became interested in exploring the foundations of mathematics. This interest has led him to study logic and finally epistemology and philosophy.

What is Phenomenology?

Husserl conceived phenomenology in three important ways. Firstly, it was conceived as the science of sciences, which endeavoured to discover the basis of

consciousness. In the second view, phenomenology was conceived as a first philosophy and therefore, it is coextensive with philosophy, as traditionally it was the latter which had been enjoying the status of first philosophy. The third conception of phenomenology is the most important one, where it is conceived as a transcendental idealism. This view conceives the transcendental ego as the source of all meaning.

As a philosophy, phenomenology initiates a break from many traditional concerns and inaugurates a new way of thinking. It was one of the most influential philosophical movements of 20th century western philosophy, as it inspired the emergence of many other movements in philosophy like Existentialism and Hermeneutics. Phenomenology was introduced at a time when philosophical thinking was facing a crisis and it has given a new life to German philosophy, which had lost its glory with the decline of the great idealistic tradition.

As the name indicates, the subject matter of phenomenology is the idea of phenomena, which according to Husserl, refers to ourselves, other people and the objects and events around us. It also includes the reflection of our own conscious experiences, as we experience them. According to Husserl, phenomena constitute the things *as* they are given to our consciousness, whether in perception or imagination or thought or volition. The fundamental objective of phenomenology is to study the phenomena, which is experienced in various acts of consciousness.

In this sense there are two types of phenomena; mental and physical. Mental phenomena constitute of what occur in the mind when we experience something. They also include the acts of consciousness, or its contents. On the other hand, physical phenomena include the objects of external perception starting with colors and shapes.

Phenomenology envisages isolating phenomena by suspending all consideration of their objective reality or subjective association. Here the phenomenologist is involved in a search for certainty. In this sense by equating phenomenology with philosophy, the latter is conceived as a rigorous science dealing with ideal objects or essences of things originating in the consciousness.

In developing the concept of phenomena, Husserl was influenced by Brentano, who made a distinction between psychological phenomena from physical phenomena. Brentano found that the psychological is different from the physical, as the former is characterized by what is known as intentionality. Brentano says that the mental phenomena exist intentionally in acts of consciousness, a phenomenon which is known as intentional in-existence.

Brentano and Husserl maintain that every mental phenomenon, or act of consciousness, is directed toward some object. They are about something that lies outside. While for Brentano, this is the feature of all psychological phenomena, Husserl replaces psychical phenomena with experiences or intentional experiences. The thesis of intentional directedness constitute the core of Brentano's descriptive psychology and according to Husserl, our consciousness is always intentional and it aims at or refers to something objective

The Principle of Intentionality

The phenomenological account of experience asserts two things. Firstly, it claims that everyday experiences are intentional. Secondly, it affirms that experiences always reveal their objects from a perspective. Hence the phenomenological account of intentionality reconciles the objectivism of intentionality with perspectivism of empiricism.

The principle of intentionality asserts that consciousness is always 'consciousness about' something. This aboutness of consciousness points to something outside the mind which is conscious of the object. The intentionality principle underlines the fact that our everyday experiences are directed towards objects, properties and states of affairs. At the same time, objects are revealed from definite perspectives. There seems to be a contradiction between the definite directedness of consciousness and the perspectivism of experiences. Husserl argues that, though experience reveals its object from a perspective, we are intentionally directed toward a full three-dimensional object. The different modes of consciousness we may have when we love, hate, desire, present, wonder etc. are all about something. Hence all objects of experience are presented to consciousness as transcending. They are presented as going beyond

the experience we have of them. Though all our experiences are perspectival, they also present their objects to us as transcending the perspective. For instance, when we see a tree, we do not see a mere image of the tree or a packet of sense data, but we see the tree itself. Of course the tree is seen from a definite perspective and only those parts of the tree that are visible from our perspective are seen by us. But Husserl asserts that, the whole tree is given to the consciousness as an intentional object. Hence phenomenology goes beyond mere empiricism. It goes beyond the image theory proposed by empiricism.

Husserl argues that perception enables us to go beyond the image, which is present to us. We relate ourselves to the object itself as an image to a certain extra conscious object. Husserl claims that in intentional experiences, we do not get raw, uninterrupted images in consciousness. Instead, we get the data that are already interpreted as images of some objects or other.

Brentano, while introducing the notion of intentionality had asserted that consciousness was essentially intentional and argued that every mental phenomenon was characterized by the intentional inexistence of an object. It is directed toward an object or immanent objectivity. According to Brentano, every mental phenomenon contains something as an object within itself, although not everyone does so in the same way. This object, argues Brentano, is the reference to a content. Brentano's intentionality principle thus aims at distinguishing the psychical from the physical. Brentano thus initiates a study on the nature of consciousness and also on the phenomena as they are directly given to consciousness. He argues that every mental state contains its object completely within itself as an intentional object is immanent to the mental state.

While adopting the principle of intentionality as a central doctrine in his phenomenology, Husserl proposed some crucial changes in its conceptualization. According to him, experiences are directed towards entities which are both mental and non-mental. He argues that in the experience of colour, we see coloured things and not mere colour sensations. He maintains that, entities like physical objects, persons, numbers which are not spatio-temporal, particulars like the patch of blue, universals like blueness, states of affairs, mental entities like thoughts, images and feelings, etc., can become an intentional object. In this

sense he takes phenomenology and the principle of intentionality beyond what Brentano intended it to be.

Husserl's Phenomenology

Husserl's phenomenology is not confined to a mere philosophical doctrine about the nature of consciousness and the essences that are directly given to it. Instead, it proposes a method to isolate this directly given essences. The central concern of phenomenology aims at isolating the essential aspects which constitute meanings. In other words, it seeks to isolate the essences. Everything perceived is bound up with the essence of perception which is different from the object that exists in nature.

Husserl argues that every intentional experience gives meaning. In other words, intentional experiences have the essential characteristic of giving some meaning. The fundamental aim of phenomenology is to grasp the perceived as such. It tries to grasp what is essentially given. The task of phenomenology is to capture the phenomenon as meant. Phenomenology searches for essences in the consciousness, which is the domain of essences. It searches for pure mental processes which are immanent to the sphere of consciousness that investigates them. The ultimate focus is on pure consciousness.

The various mental processes like remembering, imagining, judging, willing, describing, feeling, perceiving etc. have their own essences. The phenomenological method examines these essences, by excluding what do not lie in the mental act itself. It thus builds a science of essences. In order to find the essence of consciousness, phenomenology excludes what is non-essence. For this the major hurdle is the natural attitude, which a phenomenologist has to overcome.

The natural attitude is characteristic of both our everyday life and ordinary science. The natural attitude is the taken for granted attitude we adopt in our day to day life and in our scientific theorizing endeavours about the world. This is our usual way of existing, by believing and taking for granted the reality of the objects of our experience such as physical objects, other people, and even ideas. We simply believe in their existence and never question this belief. We take

them as “just there” and do not question their existence. In other words, we view the objects of consciousness as factual items. According to Husserl, the genuine philosophical attitude opposes this view. While the natural attitude accepts the possibility of knowledge as a self-evident fact, philosophy raises doubts about such assumptions. It affirms that the self-evident givenness of objects of our natural attitude can be questioned.

Husserl proposes to overcome the natural attitude by suspending the spatio-temporal world and focusing on pure mental processes. This process is called the phenomenological reduction, which involves a process of bracketing or *Epoche* which is the Greek word for cessation. This process of reduction aims at excluding all that is not genuinely immanent from the sphere of absolute data. What is intended is adequately given in itself.

The process of bracketing involves a suspension of inquiry. It suspends the object's status as reality and therefore, involves a neutralization of belief. It sets aside everything that is external, and the prejudices that we associate with the reality of the world. The phenomenological method thus concentrates only on the inner content of our conscious acts. It tries to isolate what is remembered in the act of remembering, imagined in the act of imagination, perceived in the act of perception etc.

According to Husserl, the process of reduction has two broad phases: phenomenological and transcendental. The phenomenological reduction attempts to focus on pure consciousness and it describes objects not in their natural causal relations, but as they appear in the consciousness. Hence it is called phenomenological. Transcendental reduction on the other hand deals with the conditions that make any knowledge possible.

According to Husserl, there are three types of reduction: the phenomenological-psychological reduction, eidetic reduction and transcendental reduction. The phenomenological-psychological reduction is conceived as the gateway to the right form of phenomenological attitude from natural attitude. The natural attitude is bracketed at this stage and it contains the description of mental acts free of theories and presuppositions. It also refrains from taking any natural-objective position.

The second type of reduction is eidetic, where the individual existence of the object in question is bracketed, since phenomenology is interested only in the essence. The *idos* or essences are evaluated at this stage. The focus here is on properties, kinds, or types and the ideal species that entities may exemplify. This process involves a free variation of the individuals in our imagination. With this it finds out what characteristics these things have in common. It locates the invariant forms which are essences.

These two stages of reduction together set the stage for what is described as the ultimate goal of phenomenological method; the isolation of the Transcendental subjectivity. As Spiegelberg observes:

It indicates that reduction has the purpose to inhibit and “take back,” as it were, all references to the “transcendent” as the intentional correlate of our acts and to trace them back to the immanent or “transcendental” acts in which they have their source. [Vol. I, p. 136]

Husserl observes that without consciousness there would not be a world at all and according to him, phenomenology has to study the realm of pure consciousness and the essential formations found there.

The Transcendental Reduction and the Transcendental Ego

Husserl argues that since the basic approaches of the reductions that involve suspension or bracketing are negative—in psychological-phenomenological and eidetic reductions—we need to adopt more positive approaches. We need to specify in what direction the reductions head to. The first two reductions move away from the natural world, and do not specify what phenomenological reduction ultimately heads to. Husserl here affirms that transcendental subjectivity is the ultimate goal of the phenomenological method.

Since isolating the transcendental ego is the ultimate goal of phenomenology, Husserl argues that a proper understanding of the ego is essential in carrying out the phenomenological exercise. He says that there is a fundamental problem with our understanding about the ego. The ego is usually conceived as the essentially nonphysical entity, which is causally interacting with the physical. We often understand the ego and its acts in naturalistic terms. The talk of the ego and its experiences presuppose the natural attitude, which

phenomenology tries to overcome. Hence it is important that we should bracket to the ego as well. This happens in the third stage of reduction, which is known as the transcendental reduction.

In transcendental reduction, we bracket the ego and its intentions. We then cease to affirm the existence of the ego as a psychological reality. In other words, the empirical or psychological ego has to be set aside. Husserl writes:

By phenomenological *epoche* I reduce my natural human Ego and psychic life - the realms of my *psychological self-experience* - to my transcendental phenomenological Ego, the realm of *transcendental phenomenological self-experience*. [*Cartesian Meditations*, p.26]

The transcendental reduction proceeds with a bracketing of the ego and its intentions. This stage ceases to affirm the existence of the ego as a psychological reality. With this we may get access to the transcendental subjectivity or the transcendental ego. Husserl believed that the *epoché* that brackets the empirical elements in consciousness would finally leaves only the transcendental ego and its pure acts. According to him, the reflection on these transcendental elements of consciousness is pure or transcendental reflection. He thought that we have direct access to this transcendental subjectivity through a transcendental experience and *epoche* is a form of transcendental experience. The transcendental ego and its pure acts are the residue of transcendental reduction.

Husserl says that, while every *cogitato* come and go, the pure ego appears to be necessary in principle. It remains absolutely self-identical in all possible changes of experience. Husserl asserts that the pure Ego is the necessary prerequisite for experience to occur. With the transcendental reduction of the empirical ego, we enter into the domain of meaning, not the consciousness of an individual human, but the essence of all meaning-making.

The notion of transcendental ego and the idea of transcendental reduction are the most interesting and the most problematic aspects of Husserl's philosophy. Though Husserl considered these ideas as the most important constituents of his philosophy, none of his disciples have shown interest in further developing them. Husserl was reported to have stated once that even after his death, his transcendental ego might exist, as it is eternal. In this sense phenomenology is ultimately a philosophy of the self.

Quiz

1. Which among the following is not the way in which Husserl has conceived phenomenology?
(a) As epistemology (b) Science of sciences (c) First philosophy (d) Transcendental idealism.
2. According to Husserl, experiences are directed towards entities which are.....?
(a) Mental alone (b) Non-mental alone (c) Neither mental nor non-mental (d) Both mental and non-mental.
3. Which of the following statements are true about Husserl's concept of phenomenology?
(i) It grasps the mental concepts
(ii) It grasps what is essentially given
(iii) It captures the phenomenon as it is stated by the sciences
(iv) It searches for concepts in the consciousness
(v) It searches for pure mental processes.
(vi) Its ultimate focus is on pure consciousness.
(a) (vi) alone (b) (ii), (v) and (vi) (c) (i), (ii) and (vi) (d) (ii), (iii) and (vi)
4. Which of the following is not involved in the process of bracketing?
(a) Suspension of inquiry (b) Takes for granted the existence of the world and its objects (c) Suspends the object's status as reality (d) Neutralization of belief.
5. What happens during eidetic reduction?
(a) Freedom from natural attitude (b) Description of mental acts free of theories and presuppositions (c) locates the invariant forms (d) Refrains from taking any natural-objective position.

Answer Key

1. [a]
2. [d]
3. [c]
4. [b]
5. [c]

Assignments

1. Describe the principle of intentionality and its role in phenomenology.
2. Discuss Husserl's notion of phenomenological reduction.

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Chapter 33

Phenomenological Reduction and Transcendental Subjectivity

Key Words:

Science of essences, phenomenological reduction, pure mental processes, invariant forms, ideal species, transcendental subjectivity.

The Method of Reduction

We have seen an outline of Husserl's phenomenology and his method in the previous lecture. Now we shall examine his method in detail and also the ultimate goal of his method. We shall discuss the three types of reduction in detail with a special focus on the notion of transcendental subjectivity.

Phenomenology was also conceived as a method to build a science of essences. We have already seen how phenomenology tries to exclude what does not lie in the mental act itself and thereby aims to find the essence of consciousness. This is done primarily by excluding what is non-essence. Accordingly, phenomenology proposes a method that helps us overcome the natural attitude, which considers consciousness as a thing among many other things in the world. In other words, phenomenology aims at isolating the immanent data of consciousness.

The immanent is understood as the adequately self-given pure phenomena in the consciousness. It is the indubitable absolute data, which does not point to anything outside itself. Husserl says that, what is intended is adequately given in itself and this immanent is beyond all epistemological questions. The process of reduction is proposed in order to isolate this immanent data. We arrive at them by bracketing the empirical data away from consideration and also by refraining from making judgments upon them. We have seen in the previous chapter that, the pure phenomena, and the pure Ego are the residue of phenomenological reduction. Phenomenology thus urges to concentrate only on the inner content of our conscious acts and distinguish the immanent object of the act from the actual object. As observed by Martin Heidegger, who was a disciple of Husserl and a prominent thinker of 20th century European philosophy, phenomenology is to let a thing show itself from itself the way in which it shows itself from itself.

Nature of Phenomenological Method

The phenomenological method is neither empirical nor deductive. It consists in pointing to what is given and elucidating it. It focuses directly upon whatever is presented to consciousness and excludes all that is not genuinely immanent or adequately self-given. Husserl introduces the idea of phenomenological reduction in his 1906-07 lectures on Logic and Theory of Knowledge. He says that his purpose is to find a radically presuppositionless science.

We have already seen in the previous chapter that there are different stages of reduction, each confining to certain limited objective. But these different stages are not clearly articulated in Husserl's work. He employs the process of bracketing in all the stages and according to him the ultimate aim of phenomenology is to expose the transcendental structures of consciousness.

The phenomenological reduction in general suspends the spatio-temporal world and focuses on pure mental processes. It employs the process of bracketing in order to see the origin of our knowledge, which has been lost sight of. Bracketing is not just a method adopted by the phenomenologist. It is a form of experience, which ultimately culminates in a transcendental experience.

What Happens in Bracketing?

One may wonder what happens to the world of objects when we bracket them in the process of phenomenological bracketing. For instance, when we see a beautiful painting, the phenomenologist insists on suspending all our beliefs about it and go beyond the taken for granted attitude of the natural world thesis. But Husserl assures that nothing is lost in phenomenological reduction. All those characteristics, with which the painting was appearing in our perception, remain the same even after bracketing. Nothing happens to the world after reduction and the reduced objects are still taken to be out there. Only our attitude towards the world is changed.

This change in attitude is what the phenomenologist intends to attain. Instead of naively positing the world around us, we focus on how the things are given to us. To clarify this aspect, Husserl distinguishes between appearances and appearances of. He says that the perceived object appears in several modes to us. There are fluctuating

multiplicities of modes of appearance. And each mode of appearance is an “appearance of”. Each appearance synthetically produces the consciousness of one and the same thing. In other words, though the mode of appearance may vary, they are all appearances of the same object.

The concept of phenomenological reduction amounts to giving a description of mental acts free of theories and presuppositions. It insists to refrain from taking any natural-objective position and focuses our attention on consciousness and its experiences. It further refrains attention from the various external objects with which consciousness is normally occupied. Hence the first step in bracketing is the bracketing of natural attitude. Nature is the universe of spatiotemporal objectivity, which is given to us constantly. Bracketing alters this attitude and it puts nature out of action. We cease to take part in it. All presuppositions about the world must be suspended, or set aside. The bracketing of the natural attitude begins with bracketing the assumption of a real, natural world to which our intentions relate. Our beliefs about particular objects and all the theories of natural science are bracketed. The search for evidences centers, not on the objects that we ordinarily intend, but on the intentions themselves and the ego who undergoes them.

But this process has certain inevitable limitations. The phenomenological reduction at this stage achieves only the broad, rudimentary form of phenomenology and it is not distinguished from psychology. Hence this process of reduction is not completely free from the natural world thesis. The natural attitude is bracketed only as it applies to the objects of our everyday intentions and not as it applies to our experiences and to ourselves. Even after this stage we continue to affirm our belief in the existence of ourselves as natural persons. We conceive ourselves as psychologically functioning conscious egos. We continue to treat our intentions as natural events making up this ego’s psychological reality. Hence the phenomenologist has to take the bracketing to the next level; eidetic reduction.

In the second stage the phenomenologist moves from fact to essence in a positive sense. This stage elevates the *idos* or essences. As we have discussed earlier, when we perceive an object the object is perceived from a perspective, but the whole object is given to our consciousness. In other words, the unity of the object is maintained in the consciousness. The different views of the object are given to consciousness as continuous, as views of *one* thing. The phenomenologist conceives that the essences give themselves

to consciousness all at once. In order to grasp the essence, phenomenology urges to eliminate all individual features of the experienced object. In other words, phenomenology places itself in the presence of pure essence and ignores all other sources of information. What we intuit is not limited to perceivable individuals, but includes forms as well. These forms are the invariable structures that reveal themselves in the process of intuiting.

Phenomenology also explains how to locate the essences. When we intuit a group of things we can intuit necessary similarities between them. Through free variation of the individuals in our imagination, we have to find out what characteristics these things have in common. We thus locate the invariant forms, which are ‘essences’. The eidetic phenomenology therefore, constitutes a method for turning the focus of any study from the concrete to the general, from individuals to their essences. Essences or *eidōs* are properties, kinds, or types—ideal species—that entities may exemplify. The properties of the individual that cannot be so “varied” belong to that essence. In eidetic reduction we have to turn our attention to the type, or essence, itself and to what is necessarily true of all individuals.

The eidetic stage is definitely a higher stage than the previous one, which is largely a form of psychological reduction. But it too has certain limitations. First of all, it only describes what is given to us and never tries to reach out to the ego to which things are given. Husserl reminds us that phenomenology is not just the study of essences, as the ultimate goal of reduction is reaching transcendental ego.

Transcendental Subjectivity: The Ultimate Goal of Reduction

It indicates that reduction has the purpose to inhibit and “take back,” as it were, all references to the “transcendent” as the intentional correlate of our acts and to trace them back to the immanent or “transcendental” acts in which they have their source. [Speigelberg, Vol I, p.136]

The processes of bracketing and reduction are expected to conclude with the discovery of the transcendental ego as the ultimate source of all meaning. The process of reduction has to progress from the eidetic level to the transcendental level. The transcendental reduction is the only means to uncover hidden intentional acts that project transcendent objects. It amounts to a complete overcoming of naturalism, as even after the eidetic reduction natural attitude prevails. It helps us to have a better understanding about cognitive process

and enables us to realize the absolute existence of consciousness as different from the existence of things in nature. Husserl affirms that without consciousness there would not be a world at all. Phenomenology in this sense has to study the realm of pure consciousness and the essential formations found there.

But what is the transcendental subjectivity, which is considered as the real ego? There are several misconceptions about the ego. Husserl says that, our usual talk of ego brings the natural attitude into picture. We conceive the ego and its acts in naturalistic terms, as we treat it as an essentially nonphysical entity which is causally interacting with the physical objects. In other words, the talk of the ego and its experiences presuppose the general thesis of the natural attitude. Hence Husserl urges to extend the method of bracketing to the ego and to its intentions.

The transcendental reduction thus brackets the ego and its intentions, not to affirm the ego as an empirical or psychological reality, but to get access to the transcendental subjectivity or transcendental ego through a transcendental experience. Here the *epoche* is a form of transcendental experience. The transcendental reduction thus brackets the empirical elements in consciousness in order to access to transcendental ego and its pure acts. By describing consciousness independently of naturalistic affirmations it reveals the inner life of consciousness. It is therefore, a reflection on the transcendental elements of consciousness. The transcendental reflection describes the intentions of the transcendental ego.

The transcendental Ego is attained as a result of the transcendental reduction. It is free from all assumptions about what the ego is in fact like as a natural, an empirical, reality. Here Husserl claims that he learns from Descartes' mistakes. Descartes, through his skepticism, brackets the natural world, but concludes his exploration with the attainment of the cogito, which actually is the empirical ego. He misconstrues the cogito as the thinking substance. The pure Ego remains absolutely self-identical in all possible changes of experience. It is not a real part or phase of experiences. As Dermot Moran observes, our ordinary acts of perception has a temporal structure of retentions and anticipations and the unity of the ego's psychic life suggest that there is a unifying factor underlying the temporal spread of consciousness. [p. 138] all our experiences belong to the ego and the ego belongs to these experiences and all of them belong to one single stream of experience.

The experiences of an object have different modes; being-directed toward an object, being occupied with an object, adopting an attitude, undergoing something etc. All these acts necessarily involve the ego and are something from the ego. In other words, the pure Ego is the necessary prerequisite for experience to occur. It is not just one more thing in the world, as a mere agent of intentional life. In this sense it is essentially differentiated from the empirical ego, which is a thing in the world. The empirical ego is an entity that occupies space, endures through time and has physical and psychic features. On the other hand, the transcendental ego is the center of disclosure to whom the world and everything in it manifest themselves. It is the agent of truth, which is responsible for judgements and verification. It constitutes the world for me and is the absolute being which the natural world's being presupposes. It is also the source of all meaning.

Since phenomenology primarily and fundamentally deals with the ego, it is essentially an egology. It is a study of the ego and its self experience. Hence the true focus of philosophy is the region of self-experience, the transcendental ego. Husserl writes in *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*:

The Objective world, the world that exists for me,.....this world with all its Objects . . . derives its whole sense and its existential status, which it has for me, from me myself, from me as the *transcendental Ego*, the Ego who comes to the fore only with transcendental-phenomenological epoché. [p. 26]

In *Ideas I*, Husserl further asserts the absolute status of the pure ego and argues that we can undertake the thought experiment of imagining the very destruction of the world - the world annihilation – yet we can see that consciousness survives as pure, absolute being. [Moran, p.151]

The transcendental ego therefore, is the realm of necessary existence. The existence of the world and its objects are contingent, but consciousness is absolute. It constitutes the world as a world of meanings and a world of objects. Husserl even conceives the pure ego as eternal. Dermot Moran cites Alfred Schutz who recalls that, Husserl in their last conversations had mentioned that, though he would die, his transcendental ego would live on. [p. 169].

Quiz

1. Which of the following matches with Husserl's understanding of the notion of the “immanent”?

- (a) It points to something outside itself (b) Raises epistemological questions (c) Is adequately given in itself (d) Represented by mental images.
2. What happens in bracketing?
(a) Objects are reduced to essences (b) The world no more exists (c) The qualities of objects disappear (d) Beliefs about the objects are suspended.
3. Which of the following is characteristic of the phenomenological method?
(a) It is empirical in nature (b) It elucidates the given (c) It is deductive in nature (d) It employs inductive generalization.
4. Which of the following does not belong to the *eidos* of an object?
(a) All the properties of a particular object (b) that is necessarily true of all individuals of the same type of objects (c) The types that entities may exemplify (d) The invariant forms.
5. Which of the following description is appropriate for the pure ego?
(a) An agent of intentional life (b) It is the necessary prerequisite for experience to occur (c) It occupies space and endures through time (d) It has physical and psychic features.

Answer Key

1. [c]
2. [d]
3. [b]
4. [a]
5. [b]

Assignments

1. Discuss the three stages of reduction in detail indicating the limitations of the first two stages.
2. Describe the salient features and objectives of transcendental reduction.

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Chapter 34

Martin Heidegger: The Question of Being

Key Words:

Phenomenological ontology, descriptive psychology, forgetfulness, *Dasein*, fundamental ontology, Being, destruction or dismantling of the tradition.

This chapter introduces the philosophy of the great 20th century German thinker Martin Heidegger. He was born on September 26th, 1889. During his early days he was influenced by Franz Brentano's descriptive psychology. But the most important influence was from Edmund Husserl with whom he worked several years as an academic assistant. Husserl encouraged him to turn his attention to mathematics and philosophy and since 1919 he worked very closely with the former and everyone considered Heidegger as Husserl's intellectual heir. During this period Heidegger carried out Husserl's original project of getting back to things themselves, but with the publication of his *Being and Time*, he deviated from Husserl's project and developed his independent philosophy which treated the question of being and its forgetfulness as the most significant philosophical problems of 20th century European thought. Heidegger wants to employ phenomenology in order to overcome this forgetfulness of Being and he developed a phenomenological ontology, which would clearly distinguish Being from entities. He complained that western metaphysics failed to make this distinction and proposes a destruction of this metaphysical tradition that would eventually conclude in the regaining of Being.

Heidegger was no doubt one of the most important philosophers of 20th century European philosophy. Politically he supported the National Socialist Party of Hitler and though he disassociated with it later, never apologized for his involvement in its political programmes. Nevertheless, he was widely respected in the academic circles as an original thinker, who has substantial contributions to the history of European philosophy. His thoughts influenced many important philosophical developments in 20th century like existentialism, post structuralism and even postmodernism. Heidegger died in Friburg on May 26th, 1976.

Heidegger affirms that phenomenology is much older than Husserl and was essentially a Greek way of thinking. The early Greek thinkers have encountered and framed the question of being for the first time during their philosophical contemplations and this problem remained at the core of the Greek philosophical thinking. This problem was raised by Parmenides who eventually distinguished being from non-being. He claimed that Being is one and non-being is impossible. Afterwards, in Plato's idealistic thought we come across a distinction between the being which is known by rational thought and beings which are objects of opinion we derive from the senses. Aristotle maintained that there was a special science that studies being and its properties, which is different from other sciences.

Husserl and Heidegger

Heidegger, though begins his intellectual career as a phenomenologist who shared the Husserlian objectives that aim at getting back to things themselves, later deviated from this and pursued a different path. Phenomenology, according to him, is not a mere study of the intentional structures of consciousness. Though Heidegger acknowledges Husserl's role in shaping his ideas he was not satisfied with Husserl's characterization of phenomenology as a study of the objects of consciousness and also in the latter's transcendental project. According to him phenomenology is a fundamental study of the relation between *Dasein* and Being. While Husserl emphasized on transcendental reduction and the concept of pure ego in his transcendental phenomenology, Heidegger's primary objective in philosophy dealt with a concern with Being and instead of Husserl's pure transcendental subjectivity, he focused his attention on the being of man which is a being-in-the-world. He replaced Husserl's transcendental phenomenology with a form of anthropology that would approach the question of being by relating it with the being of man. Husserl in his *Ideen III* says: "The wonder of all wonders is the pure ego and the pure consciousness." Heidegger on the other hand affirms in his *What is Metaphysics?* that "Man alone of all existing things... experiences the wonder of all wonders: that there are things-in-being." [Spiegelberg, p.87 and p.284]

Heidegger considered answering the question of Being as his lifelong project. But this necessarily involves another exploration; the being of man. In order to understand Being, one must first understand the being of man, the *Dasein* or the being-in-the-world. This is because, *Dasein* is the kind of Being who raises the question of Being. But to even ask the question implies that at some level the answer is already understood. Hence as a prelude to the question of Being the ontological structure of *Dasein* needs to be uncovered. Again, the study

of Being should primarily differentiate Being from beings. Therefore, the study of Being is an ontology, which will distinguish Being from beings.

Heidegger says that phenomenology is the only method by which to do *ontology*. He complains that Being has been concealed from us, which has amounted to a kind of forgetfulness of it. Hence Being has to be uncovered from its forgetfulness with phenomenology. Its primary task is to uncover Being. Heidegger affirms that the essence of truth is the disclosing of the meaning of that which we call Being.

Etymologically, the German word *Sein*, which is translated as being, corresponds to the English expression *to be*. It stands, either for the being of something in particular and in this sense refers to its existence or for its essence, in the sense for the being of something. For example, of *Dasein*. We can also speak of Being in abstract, as being in general. In this sense we cannot specify it as What or That-being. It is simply Being, and therefore, the most general feature of everything that is. It is thus the most universal concept, which is indefinable in terms of other concepts. It is thus a self-evident concept, which is mostly taken for granted. Heidegger then says that the meaning of Being is veiled in darkness and hence the question of the meaning of being needs to be restated. It has to be brought out of its forgetfulness.

QUESTION OF BEING AND ITS FORGETFULNESS

Heidegger complains that traditional metaphysical approaches have resulted in a forgetfulness of Being, which is the primordial topic of philosophical and other intellectual reflections. Metaphysics misunderstood the nature of beings by understanding them as things, as that which is simply there, as present at hand. Heidegger stresses the need for overcoming this attitude. Being has to be distinguished from the thing-in-being or what has being or beings.

According to Heidegger, in the metaphysical contemplations of the medieval and modern philosophers the meaning of Being was covered up, as they failed to recognize the important ontological difference between Being and thing-in-being. Instead of a contemplation of Being traditional metaphysics has initiated a study of the technical use and subjugation of the things-in-being. In other words, the great metaphysical tradition neglects the fundamental ontological difference between Being and the thing-in-being, between Being and entities. It is this failure that primarily resulted in a general forgetfulness of being. Heidegger maintains

that this forgetfulness is responsible for the decline of western civilization and the crisis of man. He suggests a phenomenological ontology in order to overcome this forgetfulness.

This phenomenological ontology deals with the study of Being. This is different from metaphysics that deals with the study of things in being. Heidegger complains that, we have neglected this fundamental ontology in our encounters with Being and endeavours like metaphysics, science and technology that deal with entities take the place of ontology. He was of the opinion that their domination in history and culture leads to the above-mentioned forgetfulness and crisis. Modern philosophy too had forgotten the question of Being, as it has become concerned with the *ontic* i.e., on beings. Modern sciences also fail to give an account of Being. Phenomenology is therefore expected to delineate the structures of Being and explicate its meaning. Heidegger says that phenomenology primarily involves ontological analysis and it intends to return to the original data of man's experience. Phenomenological ontology thus does two things. On the one hand it reveals the essential structures of Being and on the other hand it also involves an analysis of *Dasein*, to the being of man to whom the essential structures of Being are revealed.

As mentioned above, there is a fundamental distinction between Being and entities, a fact which is not properly recognized due to forgetfulness. This can be elaborated with an example. When I listen to music, read a book, perceive an object, I relate myself to something and comport myself to it. In this context, it is the music or the object I perceive. I comport myself to them as an entity. It is something that is there. Heidegger now says that, what it is for something to be is not itself an entity. In other words, the Being of entities itself is not an entity. But any form of comportment to anything presupposes an understanding of Being, as without such an understanding there cannot be a comport to entities as entities. Before we raise the question of Being we have an understanding of Being. This Being is neither an entity, nor a class of entities. It is not even the most general or universal concept. The question of the meaning of Being is raised in this context. This primarily involves two things. Firstly it involves the phenomenological project that involves a destruction of the metaphysical tradition that had led to the forgetfulness of being and secondly an ontological analysis of the being of man to whom the meaning of Being is unraveled.

The Phenomenological Project

Heidegger underlines the need for strictly adhering to the phenomenological formula, back to the data themselves. This is important for overcoming all abstract constructions and formulations that many mislead us. It is also important for us to avoid positing of pseudo-questions. Heidegger writes:

If the question of Being to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being – the ways which have guided us ever since. [*Being and Time*, p.44]

The phenomenological project therefore, involves the destruction or dismantling of the tradition of the history of philosophy. Since the understanding of Being belongs to the being of the entity, which we ourselves are, it is important to analyze the specific thing-in-being – the human being or *Dasein*. Here too Heidegger proposes a returning to the tradition in order to regain the original attitude. We have to recover the original existential ways of conceiving of phenomenon of human existence and for this we have to go back to the Greek roots. We have to set aside the Kantian and Cartesian elements that dominate the history of philosophy and metaphysics. The destruction of the metaphysical tradition therefore, involves the destruction of tradition, by means of a proper analysis of the traditional metaphysics.

Heidegger thus proposes to discard all the traditional ways of asking questions. What is required is a radicalization of ontology. Since the tradition conceals real issues, we have to destruct it and go back to the origins. In *Being and Time* Heidegger asserts that the traditional content of ancient ontology has to be destroyed until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being. Here Heidegger thinks much in terms of the spirit of the phenomenological tradition advocated by Husserl. He adds new dimensions to the phenomenological project with this approach, but of course, does not subscribe to its transcendentalism.

This destruction will also involve a rejection of metaphysics, as metaphysics approaches the question of Being in wrong ways. According to Heidegger, metaphysics has understood the nature of beings by understanding them as things. It simply describes things as they are. Here he reminds us that the approach of metaphysics is not pure but is based on

certain assumptions. Metaphysical understanding is affected by the way we are drawn down into everyday existing. In metaphysics the everyday set of assumptions about reality dominates and it misconceives reality as present at hand. Here too Heidegger's approach does not contradict Husserl's project, which insists on overcoming the natural attitude. But Heidegger carries this out in a different manner. He begins his phenomenological explorations with an analysis of the ontological structure of the being of man. The right method, according to Heidegger, consists in exploring the question of human existence and trying to understand it in its own terms. The method of fundamental ontology is expected to facilitate this. He says that, since the phenomena of existence require interpretation, its method should be phenomenological as well as hermeneutical. The meaning of being is therefore explored with a focus on the etymology and grammar of the word *Sein*, which is the sense or final end of Being or the destination of Being. It is the final end of a thing that makes it intelligible. Hence the meaning of Being or its destination needs to be found in the being of man. This is because, only human existence can be with or without meaning. Being has meaning only insofar as it has import for a human being or *Dasein*. Hence Heidegger proposes an existential analytic of *Dasein*. The structures of Being are revealed through the structures of human existence. Heidegger's method is therefore, phenomenological, ontological, existential and hermeneutical. It is phenomenological, because it looks for the directly given, ontological: as it distinguishes the ontology of Being from the realm of things, existential: as it explores the existential structure of man and hermeneutical, as it involves interpretation.

Quiz

1. What according to Heidegger was the primary reason behind the general forgetfulness of being?
(a) Failure in distinguishing between metaphysics and ontology (b) Failure in recognizing the ontological difference between Being and the thing-in-being (c) Failure in recognizing the ontological difference between Being and Dasein (d) Failure in differentiating between philosophy and religion.
2. Which of the following is among one of the major concerns in Heidegger's project?
(a) Destruction of the ontological question (b) Radicalization of ontology (c) Reviving the Cartesian and Kantian elements in philosophy (d) Reviving the Platonic and Aristotelian tradition.
3. What according to Heidegger has not done by metaphysics?

- (a) Approached the question of Being in wrong ways (b) Understood the nature of beings by understanding them as things (c) Simply describes things as they are (d) Explores the question of human existence and tries to understand it in its own terms.
4. What is the subject matter of phenomenological ontology?
(a) Study of Being (b) Study of things in being (c) Study of being-in-the-world (d) Study of metaphysics.
5. Where does Heidegger locate the destination of Being?
(a) In the world (b) In the being of entities (c) In the being of man (d) In human social relationships.

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [b]
3. [d]
4. [a]
5. [c]

Assignments

1. What does Heidegger mean by the forgetfulness of being?
2. Discuss the destruction of the metaphysical tradition.

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Chapter 35

Martin Heidegger: The Ontology of *Dasein* and the Concept of Truth

Key Words:

Phenomenological ontology, Destruction of tradition, *Dasein*, thrownness, being-with, authentic existence, in authentic existence, disposedness, fallen-ness, *aletheia*, forestructures of understanding, phenomenological hermeneutics.

In the previous chapter we have seen the two important aspects of Heidegger's phenomenological ontology, which were proposed as a means for overcoming the forgetfulness of Being; the destruction of the tradition and the recovering of the original existential ways of conceiving of the phenomenon of human existence. Heidegger conceives *Dasein* as the destination of Being and hence its existential analytic is important in the phenomenological ontology proposed by him.

The term *Dasein* refers both to the human being and to the type of being that humans have. The root meaning of the noun is "being there" or "being here". According to Heidegger the primary objective of phenomenology of *Dasein* is a *hermeneutic* in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates this business of interpreting. It is through this interpretation the authentic meaning of Being, and also those basic structures of Being which *Dasein* itself possesses, are *made known* to *Dasein*'s understanding of Being. (*Being and Time*, p. 62) It explores where experiences occur and for whom they occur and all these come under the scope of an existential analytic of *Dasein*.

The analytic of *Dasein* is a central feature of Heidegger's thought. *Dasein* becomes important because of its peculiar ontological structure. It is characteristically different from other entities, as it has an understanding of Being and can raise the question of Being. In other words, in its being, this being itself is an issue for it. Heidegger says that *Dasein* understands itself in its being. Another feature that distinguishes *Dasein* from other entities is the fact that it is a being-in-the-world. *Dasein* finds itself in the world, but in a very different way than other entities are in it.

Dasein's comporting to the world is different. It understands the world as a range of possibilities and it always has understood itself in terms of its possibilities.

This factor makes *Dasein's* engagements with the world and its entities very different. It cannot escape from the world, as its facticity and thrownness are inevitable and inescapable. But again, as mentioned above, its relationship with the world is also different. Unlike other entities it needs a world populated with entities for it to engage with. Heidegger says that *Dasein* is constantly more than what it factually is. He adds:

The essence of *Dasein* lies in its existence. Accordingly those characteristics which can be exhibited in this entity are not 'properties' present-at-hand of some entity which 'looks' so and so and is itself present-at-hand; they are in each case possible ways for it to be, and no more than that. . . . So when we designate this entity with the term 'Dasein', we are expressing not its 'what' (as if it were a table, house, or tree) but its Being. [*Being and Time*, 67]

Again by being-in-the-world and engaging with the entities in the world, *Dasein* is essentially Being-with-others. This aspect is therefore an ontological component of *Dasein*. *Dasein* and the world are internally related. Heidegger says that the fact that the world is not created by *Dasein* and it is not merely a factual world that exists independent of us, but we too are contributing to its creation, *Dasein's* relationship with it is significant. It is a world, which is created by others as well. Other people have a role in deciding the structure of the world. Hence others play a very crucial role in deciding what I am. *Dasein* inhabits the world along with other beings like itself. Heidegger says that "Everyone is the other, and no one is himself. [*Being and Time*, p.165]

Others thus play a crucial role in *Dasein's* constitution. What *Dasein* works upon is provided by others. What it produces is destined for others. We shall elaborate this with an example. If I am a painter, the institution of the art of painting is produced or sustained by others and my painting is for others to appreciate. The "where-of" and the "towards-which" aspects of my engagements with the world are necessarily related to the work-world of other people. Again, the readiness-to-hand of objects for me is not merely their readiness-to-hand for my *Dasein* alone. It is a world, which is outside there as a common platform, with which others also engage them in their day-to-day life.

All these factors determine *Dasein's* ontological constitution and *Dasein* is essentially a being-with. Its orientation towards ready-to-hand objects is characterized by concern or solicitude for others. All kinds of relating with the world, its entities

and other people reflect this concern, which is rooted in *Dasein*'s ontological constitution. According to Heidegger, even attitudes like indifference, hostility etc., reflect this solicitude.

A close examination of *Dasein*'s ontological constitution brings out its essential structure, which is determined by the aspects of "there-being" and "being-with". On the other hand, there is the aspect of "mineness" as well. *Dasein* is at the same time mine and being-with, or subjectivity and intersubjectivity. The *they*, according to Heidegger, is therefore, ontologically relevant in determining *Dasein*'s existential structure. In *Being and Time* [27: 165-6], Heidegger says that, the "....*they*", which supplies the answer to the question of the "who" of everyday *Dasein*, is the "*nobody*" to whom every *Dasein* has already surrendered itself in Being among-one-another".

This structure implies that the social world is a world of both others and I and the essential intersubjectivity of *Dasein* in its everydayness characterizes its subjectivity. The relationship between subjectivity and intersubjectivity determines *Dasein*'s everyday mode of existence, which can either be authentic or inauthentic. The loss of authentic individuality is a possibility in average everyday existence, because *Dasein* is determined by both "being with" and "mineness".

***Dasein*'s Existence in this World**

As mentioned above, according to Heidegger, *Dasein* has possibilities of both authentic and inauthentic existence. The word authentic is derived from the Greek word *autos*, which means, done by one's own hand. In this sense, to be authentic is to be something of its own. Since being authentic and inauthentic are *Dasein*'s possibilities, it is important to find out how man attains the possibilities of authentic existence.

To understand Heidegger's position we need to understand how Heidegger ontologizes the idea of authenticity. It basically deals with the question of "being in a certain way". Heidegger says that, to be *Dasein* is to ask certain questions concerning the problem of Being and also of one's own existence. These questions become issues only for an authentic Being. Hence to exist authentically is not to exist as an ontic entity among other entities. It is not to be a static being, but to be a being who constantly asks, searches, and becomes.

The German word *eigentlich*, which is the equivalent of the English word authentic means real or proper and the German word for inauthentic is *uneigentlich*, which means not literal or figurative. Since both are *Dasein*'s possibilities, *Dasein* is sometimes authentic and sometimes not. Heidegger says that, *Dasein*'s authenticity is hidden but nonetheless given beforehand, as it is not a substance with an essential nature and with properties or accidents and its potentiality or possibility is prior to its actuality. In other words, *Dasein* is not a definite actual thing, but the possibility of being something. Hence, it is affirmed that *Dasein*'s way of being involves the capacity to choose among several possible ways of being.

Another important feature of *Dasein* is that, it needs to be addressed with a personal pronoun, you or I. Therefore, Heidegger asserts that, "*Dasein* is mine". Its being is different from the being of other entities, which according to him, are merely present at hand. Owing to this unique feature of its being, *Dasein* can take charge of its own being. In other words, we may say that the being of man is whatever it decides or has decided to be. Such decisions or choices of man are based on one's possibilities of being. Therefore, asserts Heidegger, *Dasein* is its possibility. Hence, to be authentic is to have a room of one's own, have a mind of one's own and being one's own master. This is to be true to one's *own* self, to be one's *own* person and to do one's *own* thing.

But interestingly, Heidegger never equates *Dasein* with human being. He says that there is a *Dasein* of man. The meaning of the term *Dasein* is relevant here. The *Da* in *Dasein* refers to the disclosedness of Being. To understand this, we need to examine the other possibility of *Dasein*; of inauthentic existence. Inauthenticity refers to the average everyday mode of *Dasein*. Here the "mineness" of *Dasein* takes the form of the "they". Hence the self is a they-self and consequently, *Dasein* loses in the they.

The implication of this loss is that, it prevents man from relating with the world and understanding it in its own ways. Instead, man understands the world in the way the "they" make it available to it. This will also take away from man the possibilities of authentic self-understanding. Consequently, man accepts the prevailing opinions and conforms to what the *they* does and thinks. As a result, one's own *Dasein* gets completely dissolved into a kind of Being of the others.

The possibilities of authentic human existence are to be explored and this amounts to the regaining of one's authentic being. Heidegger here reminds us that this

regaining needs to be materialized, not by isolating oneself from others, as “being-with” is not a limitation or a constrain, but the very way of man’s being. Being-with is therefore, a typical human way of being. Here to be authentic is to relate oneself with others and with the world differently.

Heidegger further explicates how authentic human existence needs to be attained. He affirms that, since *Dasein* is essentially a being-in-the-world, the “being-with” aspect is inescapable and it has to be with others. It has to occupy with others in a practice and will have a definite role in the practice, which happens in a context where others are constantly encountered. Heidegger says that, these practices are not *Dasein*’s creations, but are socially defined and culturally inherited. To participate in such a social-cultural world and engage with several tasks in it are necessary for us as human beings. We need them for realizing our possibilities.

Dasein is therefore, placed in an interpersonal context of various practices. This context is impersonal because, others can also occupy definite roles and engage in such practices. Heidegger stresses that one’s self-understanding starts with understanding oneself by relating to such impersonal contexts. I relate myself to a function that anyone can perform, in order to understand myself, for example, the function of a poet. This function presupposes a socially created and culturally inherited institution, which is created and shared by the “they”. In other words, the “they” creates these practices and roles. I can attain my possibilities as a poet only by participating in this institution. In other words, I can attain it only with the “they-self”.

Heidegger thus argues that authenticity is an achievement. *Dasein* has to attain it by discovering the world in its own ways, different from the they-self. Its understanding of the world as well as self-understanding are related to its possibilities of authentic and inauthentic ways of existing. Since to be inauthentic is also *Dasein*’s possibility, Heidegger says that I also own my inauthentic being. In inauthentic existence I refuse to take responsibility of my actions.

***Dasein*’s Ontological Structure and the Question of Truth**

Contrary to the dominant traditions of modern philosophy, Heidegger proposes a conception of truth, which can be understood not by explicating the epistemological structure that defines normal human cognition. Instead, he does this with an account of the ontological structure that determines human situatedness. This ontological shift

radically differentiates Heidegger's account of the nature of truth and knowledge from the account suggested by the dominant paradigm of modern philosophy. It understands truth as a process of unconcealment.

Before we try to understand this concept of truth we have to reflect upon the ontological structure of *Dasein*, which differentiates Heidegger's concept of truth from other notions. The ontological structure of *Dasein* is primarily understood as disclosedness or care. Heidegger asserts that temporality is an existential feature of *Dasein*. Therefore, *Dasein* is interpreted in terms of the three temporal dimensions of past, present and future. The past is important because of the aspects of thrownness or disposedness that determines *Dasein's* being. The present is characterized by fallenness and the future by projection or understanding.

Heidegger says that, *Dasein* is characterized by its thrownness. This is because, it finds itself always in a world. The aspect of disposedness too is crucial, as Heidegger says that *Dasein's* receptiveness is manifested in different moods. Accordingly, the world discloses to me differently. Every concrete situation, states Heidegger, offers a range of possibilities for acting in which *Dasein* projects itself in the light of its different possibilities. In such projections of possibilities, *Dasein* comports itself to the world of objects and in understanding *Dasein* projects itself onto such possibilities. Among these possibilities lie the two fundamental possibilities of authentic existence and inauthentic existence.

The possibility of authentic existence lies in the fact that whatever is grasped by *Dasein* results from an act of comporting. The specificity of *Dasein* is important here. *Dasein's* ability to realize its genuine possibilities from the context of the average everyday existence decides the nature of its existence in the world. Heidegger talks about the feature of "fallen-ness", that is characteristic of the existence of all *Daseins*. Each individual *Dasein* is fallen into the world and is fallen away from itself as an authentic potentiality for being its self. The possibilities of inauthentic existence are manifested in idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity and they involve a closing off or covering up of any real understanding of the world. In other words, both these possibilities—of authentic as well as inauthentic existences—are rooted in *Dasein's* ontological structure, which enables it to comport with the world in different ways.

Heidegger thus makes this ontological structure as a determining feature of the being of man. To further clarify the importance of this concept, he elaborates his concept of truth, where the latter is conceived as a process of unconcealment.

Heidegger argues that the ancient Greek philosophers conceived truth in this sense. It was the Scholastic and modern philosophies who have corrupted this original notion.

According to the traditional concept, which is mostly Scholastic and modern, Truth is conceived in terms of the conformity between our judgments and facts. It is a notion attached to propositions and their correspondence with states of affairs. Heidegger states that, this traditional understanding of truth is derivative from a more fundamental understanding of truth as self-manifestation, revelation, disclosure etc., as according to him, such a correspondence between propositions and states of affairs presupposes a field of intelligibility within which entities may be found. In other words, prior to all cognition and assimilation of truth, there exists in us a horizon of meaning that facilitates their cognition. Such a prior field of intelligibility establishes the essential element of unconcealing present in all cognition and assimilation of truth. In other words, according to Heidegger, unconcealing is an a priori, transcendental condition for propositional truth.

The idea that truth is to be primarily understood as unconcealment is justified by citing the ancient Greek conception of truth, where the term for truth is *aletheia*. The Greek word *aletheia* means dis-closing, un-covering, dis-covering, revealing or making manifest that which in some sense lies hidden. Such processes require a pre-given context to which things are disclosed or unconcealed. Heidegger says that *Dasein* with its peculiar ontological structure is that context. It thus becomes the source of intelligibility. Therefore, truth is not a transcendently given reality in his framework. It presupposes a background of intelligibility in *Dasein*.

Hence, truth as unconcealing is possible only because there is *Dasein* and without *Dasein* there would be no truth. Entities require *Dasein* in order to be intelligible; in order to be recognized as entities that are capable of entering into states of affairs that may correspond to propositions. Hence the propositional conception of truth—the representationalist ideal—is derivative of the more fundamental notion of truth as unconcealment.

In the process of *Dasein's* comporting with things, the latter are made intelligible and they acquire meaning. Things show themselves in many ways, depending on the modes of access we have to them. In other words, they acquire meanings through *Dasein's* acts of comporting to them from its ontological rootedness. Hence according to Heidegger, philosophical enquiry is both ontological as well as phenomenological. It should begin with an examination of the ontological

structure of *Dasein*, as it is in this context things acquire meaning and appear as meaningful. Heidegger argues that, meaning is located in the entity's mode of appearing, as things do not appear themselves, but are always uncovered to someone. In other words uncovering presupposes not only what is being uncovered, but also another being to which this being is uncovered. This being is the being of man or *Dasein*.

Since truth is unconcealment and things acquire meaning in *Dasein*'s mode of accessing them, meaning is understood as involving interpretation or meaning is interpretation. Hence Heidegger links phenomenology with hermeneutics. He says that, before the questions of Being can be answered, one needs to ask who or what is raising the questions of Being in the first place. This leads to the analytic of *Dasein*.

Heidegger says that, things present themselves to us and such presentations happen in a manner, which is self-concealing. We encounter entities as beings that are in the world within which they can be encountered. *Dasein* understanding them in their process of unconcealment. Unconcealment happens to *Dasein*. It is not only part of the world but also the human condition itself. Things are not encountered as they are but always from the mode of being *Dasein*. Uncovering is a way of Being-in-the-world and is the way *Dasein* is disposed.

As mentioned above, when we comport ourselves and relate ourselves to the world, disposedness play a role. For example, when I relocate a book, which was lost long back, I feel happy and relieved. I relate myself to this book in a very different way than other people who may relate with it. The world is different for me in that mood, as it decides how I stand with respect to the world.

These moods, according to Heidegger, are not mere subjective feelings, as they are not the product of my purely subjective mind. The world of things outside too has a crucial role in the production of meaning here. But, it is not purely objective either, as the book which I relocated does not arouse the same feelings I have in everyone's mind. Heidegger in this context argues that this disposedness is a kind of submission to the world and it discloses *Dasein* as a whole. But we have no choice over our disposedness, as it is not under our control.

This scenario makes the process of understanding extremely important in determining *Dasein*'s structure. Heidegger contends that understanding is a mode of *Dasein*'s existence, as it decides the structure of *Dasein*'s being. When we understand something we understand it always "as" something, as it reveals to us in accordance

with our relating ourselves with it. The above-mentioned example of the book clarifies this point further. In the context where I have relocated it, it is not just a mere book, but it has a definite meaning for me, which I alone have and hence its mode of appearing to me is also unique. My whole being is involved in my understanding of it.

This is because, as indicated above, understanding presupposes a background of pre-understood meanings, which Heidegger conceives as the forestructures of understanding. He adds that, without this preexisting context of meaning the world looks confusing. This context offers possibilities and it also imposes constraints. In short, understanding is related to us, our life, the way we use the world and hence to our ontological horizon. Here understanding is not conceived as a cognitive act. Instead, it is projection; a projecting upon possibilities. To understand something is to grasp the possible ways that it can be used. In this sense, the perspective of my preunderstood meaning is extremely significant.

With this phenomenological ontology and phenomenological hermeneutics, which respectively explores the ontological structure of *Dasein* and tries to analyze *Dasein's* existential structure in terms of understanding, Heidegger presents a unique and different concept of the being of man. It is presented as an antithesis to the epistemological ideal that dominated modern philosophy. *Dasein* is never equated with a knowing mind, nor with the thinking substance. It is not separated from the world, as it is essentially a being-in-the-world. With this unique conception of man's being and his notions of meaning and understanding, Heidegger introduces novel problems into philosophical thinking. He is undoubtedly one of the most important philosophers of 20th century and has influenced the thoughts of many philosophers including existentialists like Sartre, postmodernists like Foucault and pragmatists like Rorty.

Quiz

1. What does the term *Dasein* mean?
(a) The essence of man (b) Universal human nature (c) The type of being humans have (d) Humankind in general
2. To exist authentically is?
(a) To exist as an ontic entity (b) To be a static being (c) To assert one's "there being" (d) To be a being who constantly asks, searches, and becomes.
3. What does the expression "*Dasein* is mine" mean?

- (a) Its being is present at hand (b) It can take charge of its own being (c) It can exist without others (d) It is autonomous.
4. What happens in inauthentic existence?
(a) Dasein exists in the world and engages with others (b) *Dasein* realizes its mineness (c) *Dasein*'s self becomes a they-self (d) *Dasein* takes wrong decisions.
5. Which of the following is not part of the meaning of the Greek word *aletheia*?
(a) Unmanifesting (b) Dis-closing (c) Un-covering (d) Revealing.

Answer Key

1. [c]
2. [d]
3. [b]
4. [c]
5. [a]

Assignments

1. Discuss the ontological structure of Dasein.
2. Explain the notion of truth advocated by Heidegger.

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Chapter 36

Existentialism

Key Words

Existence, essence, Personal choice, aesthetic stage, ethical stage, religious stage, metaphysical conception of truth, death of God, freedom, existential situation, authentic existence, inauthentic existence, thrownness, existence precedes essence, *Dasein*, contingency.

Though the intellectual background for existentialism was created in the later years of 19th century, it was more appropriately a 20th century philosophy, as it reflects some of the most prominent features of the cultural, social and political environment that determined the destiny of people who have undergone the traumas, uncertainties and enigmas of the two world wars. The following observation of Charlsworth appropriately describes existentialism.

It was, one could say, more an intellectual mood or atmosphere than a coherent creed or body of doctrine; more an outlook or "mind-set" than a philosophical "partyline"; more a method or approach than a school of thought. And it was very much a creature of the Waste Land that was Europe during and after the last world war. [p.1]

Existentialism initiates a new style and method of philosophizing with new objectives and goals. The talk about existentialism begins with the often-quoted slogan; existence precedes essence. Existentialists seem to be arguing that philosophers and philosophical traditions so far have been concentrating on what is common to all human beings. In other words, there is an overemphasis on what constitutes the essence of man, which is understood in various ways. While the religious and theological literature links it with God, the secular and rational traditions have been emphasizing on human nature which was often identified with universal rationality. Opposing this prevailing trend the existential philosophers stress on the problems concrete human beings encounter in their life. They prefer to understand the concrete man and his problems, without isolating him/her from his/her social, political and cultural contexts. They raise several issues pertaining to the concrete human existence. In general most of them emphasize on the finiteness and situatedness of human existence

As Mounier and Blow point out, existentialism is characterized by a reaction of the philosophy of man against the excesses of the philosophy of ideas and the philosophy of things. It attempts to understand existence in a concrete sense of living or lived reality, by focusing on the individual and concrete manifestations of human existence. As mentioned

above, it accuses philosophical traditions of the past of ignoring the concrete man and his problems. In its approach, it tries to understand human existence not in terms of some fundamental rational concepts, as it was done by many past masters like Plato, Descartes, Kant, Hegel etc. it shows no interest in an *a priori* and impersonal conception of human reality. Instead, it focuses on the concrete living individual in his actual preoccupation with himself and the world. Existentialism broadly tries to derive the meaning of the individual man from living or lived experiences of concrete individuals and their surroundings.

Existentialism is not a philosophical school like rationalism or empiricism. It is hard to isolate common doctrines from the writings of the various existential thinkers, who subscribe to diverse views. Yet we may identify some common themes and concerns. Most of the existentialist thinkers emphasize the importance of an individual man living his own life, rather than just being a member in the crowd. They all consider existential questions like death, meaning of human existence, God and man, values in life, nature of relationships etc., as important. In their attempt to emphasize the concrete human reality, they suspend all questions on the universal and objective values such as the essence of man, value and meaning etc. They rather give importance to questions concerning human freedom and choices and other issues related to this like dread, anxiety etc., Jaspers and Grabau make the following observation about existentialism:

Already in the nineteenth century, movements with this turn of mind kept recurring. People wanted "life," wanted "really to live." They demanded "realism." Instead of wanting merely to know, they wanted to experience for themselves. Everywhere, they wanted the "genuine," searched for "origins," and wanted to press on to *man* himself. Superior men became more clearly visible; at the same time, it became possible to discover the true and the real in the smallest particle. [*Philosophy of Existence*, p.4]

There are atheistic and theistic strands of existentialism. The theistic existentialists like Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Buber, Paul Tillich, Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers do not deny the existence of god and consider man's relationship with god as an important philosophical problem. On the other hand the atheistic existentialists like Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Martin Heidegger either explicitly deny god's existence or do not consider it as posing any serious philosophical problem. For them either god does not exist or they do not problematize god. Hence they deny the possibility of any value or meaning that are transcendental. Some thinkers like Albert Camus even treat the essential human reality as absurd.

Some Characteristic Features of Existentialism

As already mentioned, existentialism was not a rational philosophical system. Unlike other prominent schools of philosophy, not all the proponents of existentialism were philosophers. Existentialist ideas were popularised through art and literature as well. Hence they Philosophized not with reason alone. Again, existentialism was a movement, which was inspired not only by philosophers and their writings, but artists, novelists and poets have also influenced its development.

Most of the existentialists consider man as an existent subject and not just a thinking subject. They stress on the man who feels, wills, loves, hates and do many other things in the world. Yet one may not find any common doctrine that was advocated by all existentialists. The philosophers who were identified with it were very different from each other. There were theists, atheists, phenomenologists, hermeneuticians, absurdists etc. But most of them were opposed to abstract metaphysical speculations and also to the systematization of reality. There was an explicit emphasis on individuality.

Another very important feature of existentialism is that it was a reaction and response to certain important historical and political developments occurred during 19th and 20th century Europe. It was also a response to certain dominant approaches in ancient and modern philosophy, which according to the existentialists have given importance to essence over existence. As observed by Vergilius Ferm, existentialism was a reaction against the totalizing philosophy of Hegelian idealism. Ferm adds that, by conceiving becoming as a passage from non-existence (notBeing) to existence (Being) Hegel advocates the absorption of existence into essence. [p. 407]

The Social and Historical Factors

Existentialism was an offshoot of certain social and historical developments Europe had witnessed in the 19th and 20th centuries. As Nietzsche—who was a prominent 19th century thinker and who exerted significant influence on many of the existentialists—observed, the death of god was one major characteristic feature of 19th century Europe. By this metaphor, Nietzsche was pointing to the declining influence of religion in the life of people. There was a visible loss of faith in the society. Religion had provided a unity of all aspects of life, which

became a chimera with the advent of modernity. With societal modernization, social life and the individual himself encountered a fragmentation.

Moreover, 20th century in the beginning had witnessed a world war, which was followed by another more devastating one that killed millions of people. During this period Europe had witnessed unparalleled cruelties. All these have given rise to feelings of despair and disbelief in all established social, political and moral order. Again, the rise of totalitarian ideologies like Fascism, Nazism and Communism too had made the individual human being helpless and voiceless. None of them have reserved a space for the individual. In philosophy, Hegelianism had dominated European culture with its all-absorbing absolutism. The industrialization and urbanization that emerged with the advent of modernity made man a mere tool.

The existential thinkers maintain that traditional and modern philosophical categories are inadequate to understand human reality. Man has been viewed differently by different philosophical systems in the history of European thought. While some thinkers like Plato had emphasized on the rational aspects, thinkers like Descartes had associated the capacity to think as the essence of man. For certain others man constituted a unity of mind and body and for some others the essence consists in the material aspects. Accordingly there were various reductionist views about the nature and essence of man. As observed by Vergilius Ferm, contrary to all these approaches, the existentialists have stressed on the uniqueness of the concrete and real as against the abstract and possible. But they do not focus on existence as such, but have given importance to our way of encountering existence. According to Ferm, what makes the existentialists different from other thinkers is that, it was not an objective interest in an existence which is indifferent in regard to the multiple existents but a subjective interest in that peculiar existent which every one of us is. And it is in the concrete human self where the locus existence is discovered. [p. 408]

The 20th century existentialism, as mentioned above, draws its inspiration, not only from philosophers, but also from poets and novelists. The first and foremost influence upon the existentialist philosophers was the philosophy of the Danish thinker Soren Kierkegaard [1813-1855]. The writings of Friedrich Nietzsche [1844-1900] also had phenomenal influence on their thinking. Again, the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky [1821-1881] and the German writer Franz Kafka [1883-1924] too have influenced them. We shall now

examine some of these aspects which have contributed to the development of existentialism as a philosophical movement.

The Philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard's philosophy was a reaction against the Hegelian Absolute System which absorbs all individualities and particularities. He is widely regarded as the founder of existentialism, as it is in his works we find a systematic exposition of the existential themes for the first time. The relationship between man and God occupied a central place in Kierkegaard's theory. Since he was against all abstract theorization and absolutism that abolished the concrete individual, he opposed the rational explanations past philosophers had given in order to justify God's existence. Christian theologians and philosophers have always tried to do this. As Susan Leigh Anderson observes, according to Kierkegaard, faith constitutes a sphere all by itself and every misunderstanding of Christianity may at once be recognized by its transforming it into a doctrine, transferring it to the sphere of the intellectual. (pp. 51-52)

The subjective experiences of the concrete man gains supremacy in his framework. Man in relation to his destiny and his relationship with God gains an important place in his philosophy. The personal choices man makes in his actual life is an important philosophical issue for him. Therefore, subjectivity and personal choice are central themes in his thought and subjective and personal things are more important than objective and universal realities. Everything is subjective and personal and objectivity is a myth. He repeatedly asserts that subjective and personal choice is the crux of human existence. In this connection he talks about three major spheres of existence an individual can choose to live in; aesthetic, ethical and religious. In the aesthetic sphere, one lives for physical or intellectual pleasure and seeks the most immediately pleasing. In the ethical level, one accepts moral responsibility and leads a life of duty to the moral law. The third stage is the highest one, where one devotes one's life to God. Here one gives up everything; ethical standards and even the idea of universal good.

Each of these spheres of existence stands for a stage in life, with each containing its own system of values. The evolution from the lower to the higher is not natural or logical. Instead it is a matter of individual choice. The individual just decides that he has to move to

the next. Hence Kierkegaard emphasizes the role of choice, which nevertheless is always a personal choice which is not guided by any meta-principle. The individual has to make an a-rational leap of free choice which cannot be further defended. Kierkegaard narrates an individual who is passionate and discontinuous and is proceeding by sudden leaps and crises.

Influences of Dostoevsky, Kafka and Nietzsche

The great Russian novelist, Dostoevsky had problematised human limitations, agonies, anxieties and helplessness in his novels and stories and also raised the important question regarding man's relationship with God. In his novel *The Brothers Karamasov*, one of the characters, Ivan observes that, what is strange and what would be marvelous, is not that God should really exist, but that such an idea and the idea of the necessity of God, could enter the head of such a savage, vicious beast as man. Again, on another occasion, Ivan retorts:

And so I accept God and am glad to, and what's more, I accept His wisdom, His purpose which are utterly beyond our ken; I believe in the underlying order and the meaning of life; I believe in the eternal harmony in which they say we shall one day be blended.....Yet.....in the final result I don't accept this world of God's, and, although I know it exists, I don't accept it at all. It's not that I don't accept God, you must understand, it's the world created by Him I don't and cannot accept. [*Brothers Karamazov*, Ch. 3]

The novel as a whole and many other works of Dostoevsky problematize God and man's relationship with God. Moreover, Dostoevsky had also discussed in detail several other philosophical issues that concrete human beings face in their life; issues pertaining to human interrelationships, questions of greed, anxiety, death and destiny etc.

Franz Kafka's writings had dealt with the problems the individual human being faces in the modern, industrialized world. He primarily addressed the isolation of the individual in the world which becomes increasingly strange to him due to various factors. The individual's place in the world, the anxiety and guilt experienced by him are also dealt with by Kafka.

Nietzsche's philosophy was arguably the greatest influence among all. His thought had inspired the atheistic existentialists substantially. Nietzsche has shown that truth, which the European philosophical and moral traditions have treated as a concept with paramount importance, was perspectival. We have already discussed his contributions in detail in an early chapter. He discussed about the death of God and the nihilism of morals proposed by

him, envisages a situation where everything is permitted in a Godless world. Knowledge and truth are provisional and they change over time and with the ruling class. He therefore, describes Truth as an edifying name given for what are really vital lies. The *Will to Power* declares that there are many kinds of 'truths,' and consequently there is no truth.

The concept of Truth, which had been the most important and most edifying concept in the history of metaphysical traditions, had been challenged by all the existential thinkers. Kierkegaard has asserted that objective truth is existentially irrelevant and Sartre rejected all conceptions of universal truth. The rejection of the metaphysical conception of truth therefore, is a central theme in existentialism. We shall now discuss some key themes of existentialism.

Existentialism: Key Themes

Here again, if we try to identify commonalities we may not be successful, as there are hardly any theory or doctrine which all the existentialists subscribe to. Yet certain concepts like freedom, responsibility, individuality etc. appear in the writings of many of them. Though not everyone conceives these concepts in the same manner, almost all of them problematize them. For instance, while Sartre conceived freedom as an inevitable feature of human existence and asserts that, "man is condemned to be free", many others do not adopt such an extreme stance on human freedom. The idea of responsibility is a derivative from the notion of freedom. It can be argued that, since we have freedom in our fundamental projects and attitudes we are responsible for the people we become. The existentialist thinkers have emphasized on individuality, rather than on the abstract universal idea of man in general. Hence the problems faced by the concrete individual and his/her search for authentic self-hood are important for them. The ideas of self-creation and authentic existence were dealt with utmost importance by these thinkers.

The focus on the concrete individual and his/her problems prompted these thinkers to analyze concepts like angst, dread, anxiety and anguish in relation with concrete human existence. When we reflect on our freedom we realize that we are responsible for whatever happens to us and this results in a form of anxiety to which there are no metaphysical solutions offered. This dreadful situation constitutes our existence. In other words, it is our

existential situation from where there is no escape. According to many existentialists, man is bound to face this, as devoid of any religious and metaphysical consolations, he has to cope up with it and find his own solutions.

There are various possibilities for man to cope up with his existential situation. He may either try to escape from it taking recourse in religious or metaphysical doctrines about universal human nature, or simply by running away from it and remaining unreflective about his life and his destiny. Or he may face it and try to make sense of what he does with a conscious awareness about his limitations and freedom. Hence, in a broad sense, there are authentic and inauthentic ways of existence. According to Sartre, those men who refuse to take responsibility refuse to accept that they are free. They wish to believe that they are conditioned by factors which are not under their control. Sartre calls this bad faith. This is to exist inauthentically. One has to accept one's existential situation, which consists in realizing one's finitude on the one hand and freedom on the other.

Such concepts like finitude, guilt, alienation, despair, death etc., were not topics of discussion in traditional philosophy. By focusing attention on the individual, the existentialists isolate the concrete human being from all those factors that connect him to the totality, to the universal human nature. The political reality of early 20th century had prompted such isolation. It was an era of wars which killed tens and thousands of innocent human beings. The totalitarian regimes justified their repressive rule by the ideologies of Nazism, Fascism and Communism and all these made the individual totally helpless. The existentialists thus had acknowledged the tragic elements of human existence. Some like Camus have proclaimed that life is absurd, while some others were hopeful about human destiny.

Existence Precedes Essence

This is an expression coined by Sartre, which nevertheless represents the spirit of the entire existentialist movement. With an emphasis on the concrete human existence, Sartre has challenged the long tradition in philosophy that had always prioritized abstract universal and impersonal essence over actual human existence. It amounts to a rejection of the universal human essence, which would make all human beings mere copies or shadows of this universal essence. By conferring precedence to essence the existentialists thus proclaim that we do not have a "standard" existence or are created in accordance to a universal standard.

Instead, we create ourselves through the exercise of our personal freedom. Unlike other entities where their essential properties are fixed a priori, human beings make themselves through their choices and actions. Therefore, there is no a priori essence like human nature or essence that determines man. They have no model, blueprint, no ideal essence, or perfect nature to which all of them would subscribe to or participate with (Plato).

In the process of self-creation, man makes his/her essence. Man first exists, then through his actions creates his essence. Since the individual man's being and existence are treated as important, his passions, emotions and instincts are also to be treated as philosophically relevant. Nietzsche's concept of will to power was a great inspiration to many existential philosophers, as it highlighted the passion for life with all its intensity and concreteness. Kierkegaard talks about the passion to exist, while Heidegger talks about authentic and inauthentic existences of man.

The essence of a thing is normally understood as what that "thing actually is". That which is definable in a thing is called its essence. It is what is intelligible about an object. The history of philosophy has predominantly treated essence as superior to existence and many like Hegel have even absorbed it into essence. On the other hand, the existence refers to what the thing is. It is not easily definable. Existentialism gives priority to existence over essence. It is characterized by concreteness and particularity and it implies the givenness of a fact. For instance, we say that the computer exists. Here the existence of the computer is not my creation. The computer exists as something. We can simply say that, "it is".

The word "to exist" is derived from the Latin word *ex-sistere*, which means to stand out or emerge. It thus implies the negation of nothingness. It suggests that a thing now stands out from nothing. To exist is to have a place in the real world and therefore, concreteness is asserted. Existence is concrete and particular. On the other hand, essence is abstract and universal. Essentialism is a central idea in traditional philosophy. Under the aegis of essentialism, philosophical systems have always contended that existence is illusory, while essences are universals and are unchangeable and real. For instance, Plato conceived only essences as realities and treated existence of particulars as illusory, contingent and changeable. In modern philosophy we find in Hegel a total dissolution of existence in essence. Hegel's totalizing philosophy, which advocates absolutism makes individual human

existence an unreal and illusory postulation, which will vanish with reason where everything is unified with the absolute.

Criticizing this totalizing philosophy of traditional thinkers, the existentialists have emphasized the concrete human existence. They intend to distinguish the unique way in which man exists in the world. They thus attempt to highlight the ontological peculiarity of man's being which is characterized by facticity, thrownness and particularity. Hence man's exercise is characterized by these limitations and they define him. Existentialism also focuses on the scope and purpose of human existence and therefore highlights aspects like freedom and contemplates about the possibilities of authentic existence.

Almost all of the existentialist philosophers highlight the importance of individuality, particularity and subjectivity. While Kierkegaard emphasizes the contingent and the particular features that refuse to fit into some system constructed by rational thought, Heidegger characterizes man's being as a *Dasein* or a being-in-the-world. Sartre particularly highlights the aspect of freedom and contingency. None of them talk about any truth which is objective or universal. Instead, there is an emphasis on subjectivity, disclosure and unconcealment. The lived experiences of individuals with passions, emotions, fears, anxieties, confusions etc. are stressed upon.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is emphasized by Existentialism?
(a) The common element in all humans (b) The essence of man (c) The concrete existence of man (d) The ultimate destiny of man.
2. An existentialist would not emphasize on?
(a) The finiteness of man (b) What is a priori in man (c) The situatedness of man (d) The agonies of the individual
3. Which of the following is important for Kierkegaard?
(a) Logical evolution from the lower sphere to the higher spheres of life (b) Individual is morally responsible on all occasions (c) Arational personal choices made by the individual (d) Explain God's existence rationally.
4. Which is not important for Kierkegaard?
(a) Objective and universal realities (b) The personal choices man makes in his actual life (c) Man in relation with his destiny (d) Subjective experiences of the concrete man.
5. Which of the following is not true of our existential situation?

(a) It is often dreadful (b) Man cannot escape it (c) It is uncertain (d) Man can escape it through rational planning

Answer Key

1. [c]
2. [b]
3. [c]
4. [a]
5. [d]

Assignments

6. Discuss the unique features of existentialism.
7. Explain some key themes of existentialism.

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Chapter 37

Sartre's Conception of Human Existence

Key words:

Human existence, bad faith, essence, freedom, responsibility, consciousness, ego, phenomenology, existence precedes essence, universal human nature, abandonment,

This chapter will particularly focus on the conception of human existence advocated by Jean Paul Sartre and this will be explained with an examination of his rejection of essentialism and his advocacy of human freedom. Sartre has famously stated that man is Condemned to be Free. In many sense Sartre's philosophy is peculiar, as it advocates an unconditional atheism and individualism, but also accounts for concepts like responsibility. He was also a writer of short stories and novels and used the medium of literature and art in order to advocate his philosophical perspective.

Sartre affirms that human existence is characteristically different from the existence of other things in the world. He uses the term being-for-itself to distinguish human existence from other things, the existence of which can be understood as being-in-itself. Unlike other things, man's existence emerges and comes into being by negating its essence; by negating the being-in-itself. Hence according to Sartre, freedom and negation are central to the conception of man.

Sartre on Human Existence

Sartre in his monograph *Existentialism and Humanism* announces that *existence comes before essence*. As stated before, there are many factors that differentiate existential philosophers from each other. But this doctrine is acceptable to almost all of them. Both the Christian existentialists and the existential atheists subscribe to this fundamental doctrine. But Sartre's position is unique. He develops an extreme atheistic existentialist position from this basic premise.

In the development of his thought, many thinkers like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl and Heidegger influenced Sartre. Kierkegaard with his idea of "truth as subjectivity" has protested the omission of man by philosophers in their

systems that emphasized on essence or totality. His philosophy has endeavoured stressing the individual man here and now and viewed man who has passions and anxiety. He has emphasized on personal experience.

Nietzsche's influence was arguably more significant than anyone else's in Sartre's intellectual development. Sartre says that Nietzsche was an existentialist in his almost romantic emphasis upon the passion, anxiety and decision of individual man and had a sense of the tragic predicament of humanity in modern civilization. He was particularly fascinated by Nietzsche's criticism of religions in general and Christianity in particular. Sartre says that, he was inspired by Nietzsche's conception of the transcendence of passion and intellectualism through the power of some purely inward integrity of mastery. Again, Sartre who refuses to accept the validity of any transcendental values, finds in Nietzsche's approach which estimates values based on purely subjective criteria the essential attitude of an atheist existentialist.

Sartre in *Existentialism and Humanism* observes that, though Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are poles apart, the world of ideas, which their relative positions define is recognizably the same world. Sartre adds that, Nietzsche's criticism of Christianity with regard to its negative bearing upon man's complete individuation, has points of relation to Kierkegaard's sublime anti-clericalism. Nietzsche's Superman and Kierkegaard's Knight of-Faith, according to Sartre, are both conceptions of the transcendence of passion and intellectualism through the power of some purely inward integrity. [*Existentialism and Humanism*, p.9]

Another important thinker who has influenced Sartre is Edmund Husserl. Husserl's Phenomenology has introduced a new method, style and approach of philosophizing in European thought. Husserl starts with the observation that the European sciences are encountering a crisis as it advocates reductive scientism and naïve empiricism (Moran, 180). Husserl's phenomenology suggests an understanding of consciousness from a totally different light by arguing that consciousness is essentially intentional in nature; every consciousness is first and foremost a consciousness of something. Consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than

itself. Consciousness is always about something. This aboutness points to an existence other than its own and to its own existence as a question.

Husserl then goes on proposing a method of reduction, by means of which initially the natural world is bracketed and set aside and afterwards with a series of reductions finally isolates the consciousness with all its pure contents. There the contents are those things, which are directly and immediately given to it in its encounter with the world. Husserl's project envisages a transcendental reduction, where the pure consciousness—the transcendental ego—is isolated at the end.

Sartre accepts Husserl's intentionality principle but argues that the latter has mystified consciousness. He thus tries to demystify it by rejecting the transcendentalism proposed by Husserl. According to Sartre, consciousness is nothing but a consciousness of being conscious of the object before it. It is a being, the nature of which is to be conscious of its being. If there is anything as knowing consciousness, then it is knowledge of an object. He opposes the abstraction and the isolation of consciousness from the world of objects about which it is conscious of and elevating it to a transcendental realm. According to Sartre, the individual finds himself in the world of objects, which constitute the unity of his consciousness. The "I", or the ego appears indistinct through consciousness and is not a pure transcendental ego. He does not entertain an ego-consciousness distinction. When I am conscious of an object, for instance of a pen, I may express it in two ways.

(a) There is consciousness of the pen

(b) I have consciousness of the pen.

When I say (b), I separate or isolate my ego from the "consciousness of the pen" and from the actual pen that exists in the world. But (a) implies that there is no ego that can be isolated or abstracted from the process of being conscious of a pen or any other object in the world. Sartre affirms that the phenomenon of being is disclosed to consciousness. He here introduces the concept of the "being-in-itself", in order to distinguish the being of objects in the world like pen and knife. The being of phenomenon, according to him, is radically different from the being of consciousness, which he designates as "being-for-itself."

Another important thinker who had exerted significant influence in shaping Sartre's ideas about existentialism is Martin Heidegger. Though the problem of being occupies the central place in Heidegger's scheme of things, even this central problem has the source of its meaning in the being of man, which according to Heidegger is a being-in-the-world or *Dasein*. Heidegger had contended that there is nothing beyond man himself that can solve the problem of man's existence. The concept of being-in-the-world and the question of *Dasein's* authentic existence therefore, occupy very significant places in his philosophy. Heidegger even says that *Dasein* is Being's destiny. Truth and knowledge are possible because of *Dasein*.

Existence Precedes Essence

Sartre was specifically influenced by the account of human existence as both free and situated. His account of the being of man asserts particularity, individuality, concreteness and contingency. He thus rejects the Platonic idea of an ideal human being, which determines what we are. Hence man is free from any pre-given models or archetypes that would shape his destiny. Man first is, asserts Sartre, and then he makes his essence through the choices he makes. Man is what he conceives and wills himself to be. Hence it is impossible for Sartre to conceive a God who is man's creator. If there is a God, then man is not free. Atheism is natural for such an existentialist like Sartre. *Existentialism and Humanism* affirms the first principle of existentialism in the following manner:

"Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism. And this is what people call its "subjectivity," using the word as a reproach against us. For we mean to say that man primarily exists--that man is, before all else, something which propels itself towards a future and is aware that it is doing so. Man is, indeed, a project which possesses a subjective life, instead of being a kind of moss, or a fungus or a cauliflower. Before that projection of the self nothing exists; not even in the heaven of intelligence: man will only attain existence when he is what he purposes to be." [p. 28]

As mentioned above, the being of man is not just a being-in-itself, whose essence is externally fixed by some metaphysical principle like universal human nature or a divine creature like God. Man is a being-for-itself, who is free. The human individual is a subject rather than an object. He is a person rather than a thing.

Since as Heidegger stated, man's being is a being-in-the-world, once he comes into being, he and others will start defining him. In other words, he is not created according to any pre-given metaphysical model. He does not have a fixed and predefined essence in terms of which he understands himself. Hence his being is different from the being of a pen or a table. Sartre affirms that man makes himself through his choices and actions: he creates an essence for himself.

In the case of man, it is existence that precedes his essence. Essence is a product of a person's mode of existence. One may say that man makes his essence. Sartre asserts that each man is different and there is no common essence pertaining to all men. The essence of man therefore, depends on his subjectivity.

As mentioned above, the existence of things in the world is of different nature than the existence of man. Objects like a paper-knife have been made by an artisan who had a conception of it. The paper-knife's essence, which is the sum of the formulae and the qualities which made its production and its definition possible precedes its existence. If there is a God who had created man, then he is like this artisan who made the knife. Then God's relation to man would be comparable to the artisan's relation with the knife he had made. He would have defined its uses and in this sense its essence. God would have made man according to a procedure and a conception and out of a blueprint that existed in his mind. Under such circumstances the essence of man would precede his existence. God can be conceived here as supernatural artisan. When God creates he knows precisely what is he creating and each individual man is the realization of a certain conception, which dwells in the divine understanding.

Similarly, the idea of universal human nature suggests that there is a conception of human being found in every man and each man is a particular example of this universal conception. If such an essence exists, then it precedes his existence. Sartre opposes such suppositions and envisages demonstrating that there is no such universal human nature. He categorically asserts that human beings are different from other entities like the paper knife. He intends to show that while entities like paper knife have a creator, an idea before its production, man does not have a creator. Sartre outrightly rejects the existence of God and affirms that human beings have no model or blueprint. God does not

exist and hence in the case of the being of man existence comes before its essence. Man is understood as a being, which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it.

The implications of this atheism and rejection of essentialism are existentially significant. It underlines the absence of a model, which further suggests the absence of norms, standards, values and any pre-given meanings. While describing his existential position Sartre observes that the first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is. It places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. Sartre adds that, all the actions a man may take in order to create himself as he wills to be, there is not one which is not creative, at the same time, of an image of man such as he believes he ought to be. [*Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 29]

According to Sartre, man makes himself through his choices. When we make a choice between alternatives, we are affirming that what we have chosen is valuable, as we cannot choose the worse. What we choose is always the better and nothing can be better for us unless it is better for all. This implies the aspect of responsibility that is attached with the choices we make in our life. Since the choices we make are our own choices and since we always make the better among the alternatives, we are responsible for them and for what happens to others and us as a result of making those choices. We are responsible not only for our own individuality, but also for all men, as when we choose, we choose for everyone.

This situation causes anguish and anxiety. The awareness that our responsibility concerns mankind as whole results in anguish. When I know that I have to act in such a manner that humanity regulates itself by what I do, I become aware of my huge responsibilities. But Sartre reminds us that this is not an anguish that leads to quietism or inaction. This freedom, responsibility and anguish do not separate us from action. Instead, Sartre observes that anguish is a condition of action itself.

The freedom man enjoys is the cause of terrible anxiety and dread. It results in the experience of abandonment. As Dostoevsky says, "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted". Since we live in a Godless world—a world devoid of any transcendental values, meanings and guidelines—we have to find

or create our own values and meanings. The sense of abandonment is therefore, the starting point of existentialism. With the disappearance of God all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven too disappears. Sartre declares that there can no longer be any good *a priori*, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it [*Existentialism an Humanism*, p. 33]. Since there exists no “transcendental goodness” the so-called universal or social values have no sacred or metaphysical binding on us. We are therefore, not bound to follow any given moral imperatives or guidelines. Instead, we have to make choices that are individual and concrete.

Sartre thus proclaims; “man is condemned to be free”. We humans are completely free as there is no God who has given us any fixed essence. Hence we have to create our own essence. In this process of exercising freedom and by making free choices, we are completely responsible for our actions and as mentioned above, are responsible for everyone else’s too. Because we are free to create our values and our world, we must exist in anguish, forlornness, and despair. Hence freedom is not a pleasant gift, but is felt as a condemnation.

Quiz

1. Which of the following is not true of Sartre’s views about Husserl’s phenomenology?
(a) Accepts intentionality principle (b) Accepts the ego-consciousness distinction (c) Rejects transcendentalism (d) Opposes the abstraction and the isolation of consciousness from the world of objects.
2. Which of the following is true of Sartre?
(a) Essence is a product of a person’s mode of existence (b) Man’s essence depends on objective human nature (c) Existence of all men are of the same nature (d) Man is essentially a product of his circumstances.
3. Which of the following is not an implication of Sartre’s atheism?
(a) Rejection of essentialism (b) Absence of norms, standards and values (c) Man’s existence comes before his essence (d) God is a being-for-itself.
4. Which of the following more appropriately reflects Sartre’s view about responsibility?
(a) Man is responsible for everything that happens around him (b) man is responsible for everything that happens in his life (c) Man is responsible for what happens to him as well as to others as a result of making choices (d) Man is responsible for what happens to him as a result of making choices, but not to what happens to others.

5. Which of the following would Sartre advocate?
(a) We have to do our duty (b) We have to exercise our freedom while making choices (c) We have to be practical while making choices (d) We have to make choices that would benefit the society.

Answer Key

1. [b]
2. [a]
3. [d]
4. [c]
5. [b]

Assignments

1. Explain the nature of human existence according to Sartre.
2. Discuss the statement, "existence precedes essence".

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Chapter 38

Jean Paul Sartre's Concept of Human Existence

Key Words:

Existence, being-in-itself, being-for-itself, being-for-others, subjectivity, consciousness, facticity, givenness, being, subjectivity or consciousness, transphenomenality, nihilation of the in-itself, freedom, responsibility, anguish, authentic existence,

Introduction

This chapter will elaborate the three important concepts in Sartre's philosophy: being-in-itself, being-for-itself and being-for-others. We have already discussed the first two briefly in the previous chapter. We shall now examine them in detail along with the third concept, being-for-others. Philosophically, the most important influence on Sartre has come from the German phenomenological tradition and the two philosophers Husserl and Heidegger who have been the greatest inspiration for him, both in identifying the central themes of his philosophy and in adopting a peculiar approach to them.

The problem of being is the centre of phenomenological explorations of Heidegger and Sartre too begins his philosophical investigations with this problem. We have already seen in the previous chapter that how Sartre had critically appropriated Husserl. He criticizes the Husserlian project that aims at uncovering the meaning or essence of phenomenon through phenomenological reduction. Instead, Sartre is of the view that phenomenon has no meaning or essence. He maintains that being is only the ground upon which objects can reveal themselves to consciousness. According to him, what is important is consciousness and hence man's being.

While discussing the important features of man's being, Sartre identifies three constituents of being; being-in-itself, being-for-itself and being-for-others. The being-in-itself refers to the objects that are just there. These objects have no awareness of or value for themselves. On the other hand being-for-itself refers to the being of man. Sartre reminds us that contrary to other things, human beings are aware of themselves and their consciousness of their own existence is central in their being. Again, while the being-in-itself is the principle of objectivity or facticity, the being-for-itself stands for the principle of subjectivity or consciousness. The being-in-itself refers to the being of things i.e., to their essences which are fixed and hence are neither active nor

passive. The being-for-itself refers to the being of individuals and their existence. Man defines his own essence and gives meaning to his own existence through the choices he makes.

Sartre argues that, though the being-in-itself and being-for-itself mutually exclude, they are nevertheless combined in human being. Man is both being-in-itself and being-for-itself. These two aspects of being—in-itself and for-itself—represent facticity and transcendence respectively. Facticity stands for the givenness of our context, which we cannot change and transcendence refers to our ability to transcend facticity through our choices. We humans are always “more” than our situation. Sartre maintains that, though the being of man is characterized by facticity, it nevertheless does not prevent us from being free and exercising this freedom.

Another important feature of man’s being is its essential temporal nature. Man exists in time; past, present and future. The aspect of facticity refers to our past, which remains without any change. Future becomes relevant only for man, as he projects himself to the future. In this sense, man’s essence is never completely fixed. He is yet to be. Let us now discuss the three aspects of being in detail, which is present in the being of man.

Being-in-itself

With the concept of being-in-itself, that which is defined by facticity and an essence, Sartre rejects Aristotle’s doctrine of potentiality, where things are conceived as potentially evolving to higher and higher points of realization of their essential nature. Aristotle has cited the example of a seed evolving into a tree in order to highlight this evolutionary aspect of reality. Contrary to this Sartre claims that, whatever is, manifests itself in actuality and there cannot be any potentiality for other than itself. Accordingly, an object is no more than what it is in itself. The idea of being-in-itself refers to the being of objects and entities other than humans.

Sartre says that the being-in-itself is neither passive nor active, neither an affirmation nor a negation. It is massive, rigid and still and is that which it is. Therefore, it excludes other being and is unrelated to other beings. It is a synthesis of itself with itself, fully positivity, dense, massive and is beyond time. It is radically contingent, inexplicable and absurd and there is no ultimate ground for the existence of a being. [Bochensky, p. 175]

On the other hand, being-for-itself or the being of human beings suggests the presence of a free and knowing being such as a man in a rigid, immobile and deterministic universe. [Bochensky, p. 175] But Sartre says that man is both in-itself and for-itself. Hence there is an ambiguity surrounding man's being. It involves both facticity and freedom. Men are both physical objects—and hence Being-in-itself—and self-consciousnesses—and hence Being-for-itself. But the fact that the being of man is always a subject, and never an object affirms that man is a fundamentally different kind of being.

Sartre on Consciousness: Reversal of Husserl's Absolutism

Consciousness is related to the things in the world, which constitute the being-in-itself in a peculiar way. It reduces the being in-itself to what it is *for* consciousness. Till this point Sartre is in agreement with Husserl, who proposes the intentionality principle in order to characterize consciousness. But unlike Husserl who isolates the transcendental consciousness from the rest of the things in the world, Sartre conceives the subject as ontologically united to the things in the world to which it is present to. Since consciousness is a being to which things are present to, it cannot be an in-itself and passive. Sartre thus maintains that, consciousness could not be what it is unless it is related to a being, which is distinct and independent of it. This being is in no need of consciousness, as it is independent. On the other hand, consciousness is entirely dependent upon it. This is therefore a reversal of Husserl's absolutism, which asserts that the entire world owes its being to the ego.

Husserl confers a transphenomenality to consciousness and asserts that it is for consciousness or ego the world exists. Contrary to this, Sartre confers transphenomenality to being and argues that being does not exhaust itself in its appearing. The being of that which appears does not exist only in so far as it appears. Therefore, according to Sartre, consciousness is consciousness *of* something as it appears to it, for example, a pen or a table.

Consciousness must be other than being and its activity and hence Sartre contends that it is a process of nihilation. It arises through a negation or nihilation of being in itself. For instance, while I perceive a pen, I am also conscious that I am not the pen. Hence every instance of being conscious of something involves a nihilation. But this is not a complete negation. Since everything which is must be a being, man

cannot be a complete non-being. Therefore, man is also a being-in-itself. Certain things are fixed for man like the body, place of birth, historicity, facticity etc. But man is more than these fixed certainties. Man's being is not just that fixed sum total. He is not just his facticity. Sartre says that man has the ability to project himself to the future. Hence he is not a mere being-in-itself. He is not just a thing among other things, but is consciousness. Since man lacks any particular definite essence, apart from the ways he has created himself through the various choices he makes, we may say that man is not any particular thing or object; man is "no thing".

This aspect of man's being brings man in connection with nothingness in a peculiar manner. Man's being can only be non-being and therefore must consist in nothing. Sartre says that nothing comes into the world through man. The human self is both itself and not itself. Sartre holds that it is paradoxically present to itself in the mode of negation. According to him consciousness, which characterizes man's being, is distantiation or separation from being. Hence man is the being through whom nothingness comes into the world. Man is the being-for-itself. But without being the nihilation of the in-itself, there can be no for-itself. Sartre says that its nothingness places it in a perpetual struggle towards the in-itself.

Sartre holds that nothingness becomes apparent in man's freedom. As Heidegger points out, temporality is a feature of man's being. Again, man projects himself to the future. By doing this, he refuses to get freezed in his past. If we are determined by our past, we would not be able to choose. But man makes choices and defined his essence through that process. Hence he negates his past. Man projects himself to the future by virtue of negation of facticity and freedom.

Freedom has been a central theme in Sartre's existentialism. It is a fundamental fact concerning the being of man. Because man is not a being-in-itself, and hence is separated from being, he is not determined by being and is essentially free. Sartre says that human freedom precedes the essence of man and makes it possible. Man makes himself through his choices and therefore, he is nothing else but what he makes of himself.

In a sense Sartre proposes an inescapability of freedom. But his theory of man's being is not a metaphysical theory of human subjectivity. He conceives freedom as an actual feature of lived human experience. Again, the concept of freedom does not suggest a metaphysical theory of human nature. Inescapability of freedom does not mean that each individual can choose whatever he wants. Sartre

argues that, freedom is inescapable as it determines the nature of our being. This inescapability suggests that we have to make choices with responsibility. Even when we do not make a choice, we are exercising our freedom and are actually making a choice. Even to choose to be a slave of someone else or blindly imitating others are all instances of freedom.

But the idea of freedom also calls for the notion of responsibility. If we are free to make choices in our lives, we are also responsible for those choices. Hence freedom is linked with the possibility of authentic or truly human life. Sartre affirms that, what is important is not what is chosen, but in what manner it is chosen. Hence in order to have an authentic life one has to recognize the inescapability of freedom and accept the responsibility associated with it. Since responsibility is associated with freedom, one cannot escape the anguish that may follow the inescapability of freedom. Anguish therefore, is a condition for freedom and action.

Freedom is the freedom to make choices in life. It also implies that there are no eternal guidelines or norms that have any transcendental validity which would help us while encountering alternatives. Hence there is uncertainty about the future. Each choice will have consequences, on which we have no control. Some of these consequences are better than others, but we can never know which choice leads to better consequences. Our existential situation is our objective situation and it leaves us as free individuals who have no objective guidelines. The choices we have are not dependent on circumstances external to us. By choosing we make ourselves.

To exist authentically is therefore a challenge. It is to live with the realization that our freedom is boundless and we have no option but to make individual choices. In the absence of transcendental norms and guidelines, it is bound to encounter anguish and we have to accept this as a fact. It is part of our existential situation. We have to act based on the choices we make and should not blame external factors or circumstances. We have to take responsibility for choosing them as we are free.

Being-for-others

The third dimension of being is called the being-for-others, which become relevant in the contexts where human beings encounter each other. When we encounter other people, we realize that we are not encountering mere objects, which cannot react, but

subjects who are conscious agents. We have to explain how do we understand the other? Here we need to explain the bridge from consciousness to consciousness.

Modern philosophy had widely adopted an epistemological explanation in order to account for the encounters of the subject or consciousness with the rest of the animate and inanimate world. But according to Sartre this is inadequate for explaining the relationship between human beings. He says that being is the ground for our relationship to others and hence ontology which deals with the disclosure of being is important.

Sartre further contends that our relations to other people are of the very essence of man. Unlike our encounter with objects, we here experience the other and encounter the subjectivity of the other. The realization that the other we encounter is a subject posits a potential threat to our own subjectivity, as it raises the possibility that we may become an object to the subjectivity of the other consciousness. One experiences oneself as being subjected to the objectification of another subject. In order to explicate this further Sartre describes the phenomenon of shame consciousness.

Sartre cites the example of a voyeur who peeps through a keyhole and suddenly realizes that another person is looking at him and judging him. This experience of shame consciousness is analogous to the pre-reflective consciousness of the consciousness of objects. The voyeur here experiences the subjectivity of the other. This is characteristically different from the experience of objects. The recognition of other's subjectivity forces certain modifications in our existential structure. It suggests that my self-conception does not depend solely on me, as others can potentially objectify me. The other-as-subject turns the voyeur in a being-as-object.

This aspect reveals a potentially conflict-ridden relationship we have with others. The fact that others can objectify me forces me to see others as objects by denying them their subjectivity. We want to make the other support our own self-conceptions. This may lead to conflicts and in his play *No Exit* one of Sartre's characters proclaims that other people are hell. But there is no ultimate solution to this situation. Such conflict-ridden relationships with others are also part of our existential situation which we cannot overcome. This will never be stabilized, as we cannot find ultimate and absolute solace in any metaphysical principle.

Sartre's philosophy tries to present a picture of individual man and human reality as such with an emphasis on concrete human beings and their problems. He presents a picture of human reality, which does not claim that ultimate solutions are possible for all human problems. Instead, his existentialism encourages man to accept his facticity and inescapability of freedom and urges him to lead a reflective life with awareness by taking responsibility. He does not propose a metaphysical theory of human destiny with a conception of *summon bonum*, but instead reminds us the importance of living an authentic life without quietism and pessimism. Existentialism, claims Sartre, is humanism.

Quiz

1. According to Sartre, man's being is.....
(a) Being-in-itself (b) Being-for-itself (c) Both being-in-itself and being-for-itself (d) Neither of the above.
2. Which of the following is not an aspect of man's being?
(a) Temporality (b) Facticity (c) Transcendence (d) Boundedness.
3. Which of the following is essentially true of the being of man?
(a) Is being-in-itself (b) Is being-for-itself (c) Is a subject (d) Is an object.
4. Which of the following is not held by Sartre?
(a) Transphenomenality of consciousness (b) Transphenomenality of being (c) Consciousness is dependent upon being (d) Consciousness is a process of nihilation.
5. Which of the following is implied by the notion of freedom?
(a) Freedom precedes the essence of man and makes it possible (b) Freedom to choose the alternative that has desirable consequences (c) Relieved of facticity (d) Certainty about the outcome of our projects.
6. In the example of shame consciousness cited by Sartre, what does the voyeur experience?
(a) The other as an object and himself as a subject (b) The other as subject and oneself as being-as-object (c) The other and oneself as subjects (d) The other as well as oneself as objects.

Answer Key

1. [c]
2. [d]
3. [c]
4. [a]
5. [d]
6. [b]

Assignments

1. Explain Sartre's concept of freedom and its importance in his existentialism
2. Explain in detail the three aspects of the being of man.

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Chapter 39

Postmodernism

Key Words:

postmodern, progress, reason, metanarrative, antifoundationalism, idea of progress, universal rationality, value-neutrality, structuralism, poststructuralism, unified self, presence, origin, unity, transcendence of norms, fractured self, discourse,

In this chapter we shall examine the major characteristic features of postmodernism. We shall first of all examine the concepts of the human self advocated by the proponents of postmodernism and then try to understand the different approaches adopted by some of the postmodern thinkers. Stuart Sim observes in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*:

In a general sense, postmodernism is to be regarded as a rejection of many, if not most, of the cultural certainties on which life in the West has been structured over the last couple of centuries. It has called into question our commitment to cultural 'progress' (that economies must continue to grow, the quality of life to keep improving indefinitely, etc.), as well as the political systems that have underpinned this belief. [p.vii]

We may observe that, it is easier to give an account of what postmodernism is not, rather than positively articulating what it is. It is not just a philosophical school or system but refers to various developments that happened in culture in general and particularly in the realms of literature, film, architecture, art etc. To highlight its negative features, it is characterized by scepticism, antifoundationalism and a dislike of authority. It radically questions the Enlightenment project and its associated notions of progress and emancipation based on reason. In this sense, it can be conceived as a reaction to modernism. Postmodernism raises its voice against the liberal humanist ideology that had dominated culture since the eighteenth century.

General Features of Postmodernism

As mentioned above, the term postmodernism refers primarily to a variety of responses towards life, culture and values and therefore, it is easy to conceive it as a reaction against and rejection of some long established assumptions, particularly those which became prominent with the advent of modernity. It questions the enlightenment concept of progress and affirms a disbelief in the purity of knowledge. It proposes to

examine the goals and aspirations of modernity and is visibly anti-authoritarian. As Jean-François Lyotard says, it is a reaction against the universalizing theories or grand narratives/metanarratives. In his influential book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* Lyotard opposes the totalizing nature of metanarratives and their reliance on some form of transcendent and universal truth. He defines postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives. [p. xxiv] As Hugh J. Silverman observes, postmodernism tries to marginalize, delimit, disseminate, and decenter the primary (and often secondary) works of modernist and premodernist cultural inscriptions. [p. 1] Postmodernists thus attempt to re-read the texts and traditions that have made premodernist and modernist writing possible. They thus oppose the basic assumptions of modernist thought. Mary Klages has listed out a few premises which are central to humanism/modernism. We shall examine some of them. There is the concept of an autonomous self with its ability to know itself and the world through reason. Based on this assumption, modern philosophy had tremendous faith in the power of science. It believes that science provides unbiased, objective and universal truths that lead us toward progress. Reason is here taken as the ultimate judge that decides what is true, what is right, and what is good and language, which is the distinctive human capacity, is considered as the representation of the world.

The Modern and the Postmodern

Modernity was a reaction against the inadequacies of traditional worldviews. The modernists contended that all the traditional ways of understanding the world and society have become obsolete and there was an urgent need to come up with new moral, philosophical, cultural or political principles to understand and deal with the changing world. The (re)emerging idea of reason had provided them the hope for building a new world on universally objective foundations.

The postmodernists in turn have argued that these modern attempts to reinvent humanity are insufficient and futile. They have contended that reinventing new and absolute principles amount to newer forms of authoritarianism and have concluded that all such hopes are false. In this context the postmodernists have urged the abandoning of all metanarratives that are foundational principles. This they thought would expose the infinite field of differences within humanity. The idea of constitutive otherness is derived from this insight. Through their critical approaches,

the postmodernists have attempted at exposing the mistakes of modernity and have declared that modernity has come to an end.

The two most important features of postmodernity are their opposition to the idea of progress and their rejection of metanarratives. By opposing the idea of progress they have questioned the modernists' conviction that reason and science would lead to progress. Based on this optimism all the so-called modern institutions aim at this rational ideal. The idea of universal rationality itself is a metanarrative and modernity has many such metanarratives which consume different local narratives. For instance, with its notion of universal rationality, modernity has its idea of human welfare, which it blindly applies to all possible situations and all human communities. In this process it neglects the ideas of welfare nourished by different societies and communities in relation with their local surroundings. It thus pretends to send out a universal message and often forcefully suppresses or consumes the local narratives.

By advocating the idea of a concept of universal knowledge, the modern West committed a major mistake. It contended that such a notion of value-neutral, objective knowledge could be discovered by the human mind and the modern West did possess it. Correspondingly, it had assumed the possibility of a disinterested knower who possessed such knowledge. It also believed that the entire humanity was benefited by this knowledge. The postmodernists assert that this supposition is a myth. They thus proclaim that modernity has ended.

In one sense, ruptures were already present in the Enlightenment concept of rational modern society. Kant's rational project had exposed the fragmentation of the modern society and self into three different and autonomous domains of reason; pure, practical and aesthetic rationalities. Kant had attempted to reunite this with aesthetics, but the problem of fragmentation persisted. This has been recognized as a problem of the Enlightenment project in general; the central unity underlying all aspects of human experiences Vs. fragmentation of the self and of society. Hegelian idealism and many other philosophies of modernity tried to find a solution to this problem, but had failed to achieve complete success. In Nietzsche's writings we find an ultimate proclamation of this fragmented society that was devoid of any universal sacred values and meanings. Nietzsche's Zarathustra preaches the death of God and the coming of the Superhuman. As Sim observes:

Postmodernism has drawn heavily on the example set by antifoundationalist philosophers, perhaps most notably the iconoclastic nineteenth-century

German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, whose call for a 'revaluation of all values' constitutes something of a battle-cry for the movement. [p. 3]

Different philosophies like Marxism, existentialism, Phenomenology and psychoanalysis also depict the estrangement of the individual from his or her authentic modes of experience and being and the experiences of fragmentation and meaninglessness in an increasingly technologizing and industrializing world. The post World-War II France had witnessed the emergence of many new philosophical approaches like structuralism and poststructuralism. Thinkers like Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, who have later contributed significantly to the postmodern philosophy, initially belonged to the structuralist tradition.

The Roots of Postmodernism

The term postmodernism was first used by the German philosopher Rudolf Pannwitz in 1917, while he was referring to the nihilism of twentieth-century Western culture. In literary criticism it appears as a reaction against aesthetic modernism during 1950s and 60s and in philosophy it was associated with French poststructuralist philosophy. The important 19th and 20th century intellectual and philosophical movements like Marxism, existentialism and Phenomenology and their methods consider the notion of self as central to their framework. They all consider the alienation of the self as an important philosophical problem and have discussed the possibilities of authentic and inauthentic human existence. What is common to these philosophical approaches is their dislike toward abstract theorization. As we have seen in some previous chapters, existentialism particularly stresses on the individual man and his/her problems in the world.

Structuralism on the other hand, focuses on culture and hence on structures like language, ritual and kinship that creates the self. But this does not amount to a natural scientific enquiry of the individual subject. Yet, it does not adopt a purely subjective approach, but concentrates on language which is thought to exhibit a relative stability in the production of meaning. Structuralism holds that culture decides the nature of language-world relationship. Hence the word—object connection is arbitrary and conventional. Nevertheless, it is not merely subjective. They maintain that language is a system of signs, which induce a predictable response on the part of the linguistic community. But the stress on language and the attention it

gives to the aspects of conventions and customs make structuralism a unique philosophical approach that is different from many modern philosophies.

Poststructuralism, on the other hand rejects structuralism and its methods. Like structuralism, here too language is considered philosophically significant, but the poststructuralists have opposed the scientific pretensions of structuralism. Their approaches were influenced by the idea of constructed self. They have adopted a more radical approach to the conceptualization of language and have challenged the possibility of rational inquiry into truth. They have opposed the idea that the world is knowable with the methodology suggested by structuralism.

Poststructuralism was a reaction against modern rationalism and all forms of foundationalism. It originated in France in the 1960s and rejected many fundamental intellectual pillars of modern Western civilization. The poststructuralists have challenged the conceptions of objective knowledge of the real world. They have opposed the idea of one single textual meaning and have challenged the conceptions of a historical human subjectivity. In this sense, the poststructuralists vehemently criticized the notion of universal truth. The influence of this anti-foundational approach was visible in the fields of art, literature, politics and culture in general. The emphases on multiculturalism, feminism, identity politics etc., which are features of postmodern scenario, reflect this poststructuralist temperament.

Following these insights, the post-modern period witnesses an opposition to all concepts of a unified self. The postmodernist thinkers criticize the concepts of objective and unquestionable meaning. They too emphasize the importance of language, culture and discourse, but categorically assert the decentered aspect highlighted by many others.

As mentioned above, postmodernism is not just an intellectual reaction against modernity or a philosophical school that opposes modernism. It is a movement which has contributed to the evolution of a cultural and intellectual environment which stresses decentering, opposes all kinds of metanarratives and criticizes the conception of a unified self and the idea of a common rational ideal for all men. Along with philosophers, writers, artists, painters and architects have participated in this radical reaction against and rejection of modernism. With postmodernism, art became more and more eclectic. The postmodernists have challenged all traditional distinctions in art are like high-low, fine-commercial, truth-seeking modern avant-garde-superficial, classical-popular etc. Hence the impact of postmodernism is felt more intensively in

the domain of art and culture and the difference between the two approaches of modern and postmodern can be brought out by highlighting how modern and postmodern artists have approached their profession

The modern artist is a person who has materialized a break with tradition and with the past. He offers a critique of the conditions of his own culture and society, as he takes a privileged view of the social and the psychological concerns of the day. The example for such a modern artist is Charlie Chaplin in the movies *Modern Times*, and *The Great Dictator*. In these movies we see the artist as a visionary, who has a grand dream for the entire humanity. He is critical about certain practices of the industrial society. He has a universal message to all humans, which ensures humankind emancipation. On the contrary, the postmodern artist does not have any privileged status. He never claims to be an authority of meaning and value. Unlike the modern art, the text in postmodernism is decentered. It has no intrinsic value or meaning, but it acquires value in its intertextual relations with other texts.

Several social and political developments witnessing 20th century have significantly contributed to the development of the postmodern condition. It was a period that has witnessed the end of European colonialism. The development of mass communications and media culture has suggested drastic changes in the ways humans perceive things in the world and live in it. Changes in the global economic sphere and the growth of international marketing have suggested radical changes in culture. The end of cold war has opened up the possibilities of new alliances in international politics and trade, but has also led to the possibilities of new hostilities and polarization. The decline and fall of Marxism was arguably the most significant political event of post WW II Europe. All these developments have created new global equations at the economic, political and social realms, which ultimately led to the emergence of a post-industrial society, which made old meanings and values irrelevant

The post-industrial society is characteristically different from the modern industrialized world, as with its emergence, knowledge and information have become crucial for economic and cultural survival. This period had witnessed a revolt against many existent forms of authority and it challenged the rationalism and liberal individualism that were the hallmarks of modern societies. As Sim would put it:

One of the best ways of describing postmodernism as a philosophical movement would be as a form of scepticism-scepticism about authority,

received wisdom, cultural and political norms, etc.-and that puts it into a long-running tradition in Western thought that stretches back to classical Greek philosophy. [Sim. 3]

Some Postmodern Themes

Let us now discuss some important postmodern themes. We shall focus on four of them here.

1. Presence or presentation Vs. representation and construction
2. Origin Vs. phenomena
3. Unity Vs. plurality
4. Transcendence of norms Vs. Immanence of norms.

1. Denial of Presence

The idea of presentation refers to what is directly and immediately given in experience. For example, the epistemological tradition of modern philosophy has treated the perception or sensation or sense data as the directly given, which is more reliable or certain. Countering this, the postmodernists have emphasized the notion of representation and affirm that everything is mediated by the human factor. We employ the mediation of linguistic signs and concepts in order to construct them. They thus argue that nothing is immediately present.

2. Denial of the Notion of Origin

Both traditional and modern philosophies have subscribed to this notion of origin. In the modern period we have a rational and secular interpretation of this notion of origin. This refers to the idea of the ultimate source of meaning, of selfhood, of life, of reality found by reason. There is an attempt to understand the deeper realities of the phenomenal world. Many philosophies and theoretical approaches that were dominant during the first half of 20th century like existentialism, psycho-analysis, phenomenology and Marxism attempt to discover the origin of the self. In early hermeneutics, particularly in the works of Schleiermacher and Dilthey we find an approach that tries to locate the meaning of the text in the author's intentional life, which they believed was an historical sphere from where it needed to be discovered using a method. Contrary to this postmodernism has proclaimed the death of the author.

3. Denial of Unity

The postmodernists have challenged the idea of unity manifested in the notions of meanings and conceptions of self. They assert that all cultural elements like words, meanings, experiences, human selves, societies etc. are constituted by relations to other elements. They maintain that nothing is simple, immediate or totally present. They also oppose the possibility of a complete analysis of anything and therefore argue against the idea of absolute meaning.

4. Transcendence of Norms Vs. Immanence of Norms

The postmodernists have opposed the notion of transcendence of norms and have argued that values like truth, goodness, beauty, rationality, etc. are not independent but are products of and are immanent in the processes they find application as norms. Every such norm is conditional to the time and place and serves certain interests. They depend on certain social contexts.

From this radically different idea about meaning, the postmodernists have derived another important theoretical insight; the idea of constitutive otherness. They categorically affirm that all normative claims are problematic and hence there are no fixed norms or guidelines to decipher the meaning of the text. In this context, the postmodernists suggest textual analysis through constitutive otherness. As Cahoon says:

The apparent identity of what appear to be cultural units — human beings, words, meanings, ideas, philosophical systems, social organizations — are maintained in their apparent unity only through...an active process of *exclusion, opposition, and hierarchization*. A phenomenon maintains its identity...only if other units are represented as foreign or “*other*” through a hierarchical dualism in which the first is *privileged* or favored, and the other is *deprivileged* or devalued in some way. [p. 11]

They deny the idea of textual unity and argue that every text needs to be understood in terms of the dependency of its elements to others. They then emphasize on the excluded or "marginalized" elements of the text and argue that it is the margins that constitute the text. Accordingly, we must be sensitive to the elements that are not mentioned or devalued in the text explicitly. In other words, they claim that every text implies a repression and the privileged theme of the text depends on the marginalized, which will be brought out in the analysis.

The Postmodern Subject

Since the postmodernists oppose all kinds of unity, they reject the idea of a unified subject with a self-sufficient agency. They refuse to identify anything universal or a-historical in the conception of the self. They also deny the idea of one-dimensionality associated with the notion of self and argue that the subject is necessarily fractured and indefinite due to the complex social relationships it enters into and the multiple ways it interacts with the world.

This idea of a fractured self is directly in contradiction with the idea of self, advocated by modern philosophers. The modern self is the autonomous knowing subject for whom the world is an object of knowledge. They have contended that the perceptions of the self are representations of an external world and knowledge is based on representations. The Cartesian-Kantian ideals of the self posit a rational, universal, knowing subject as the human self.

Contrary to this, the postmodern view of the subject is conditioned by several factors. As Foucault observes, our subjective experience is socially and historically constituted by factors that we unconsciously internalize. He emphasizes the social aspect of discourse in which the self is situated and formed. Fredric Jameson presents another very interesting idea of the self. He presents the picture of a subject that lacks cognitive maps, which allow us to position ourselves in this world and to know where we are. The post-industrial postmodern scenario forces us to have serious rethinking about subjectivity from the context of humans-technology interfacing. This is because science and technology have drastically altered the subject, its interactions, its potentials and its self-conceptions. It is a fact that certain drugs can significantly alter our behaviour and thereby our subjectivity. As Deleuze and Guattari observe in *A Thousand Plateaus*: Cybernetic and informational machines form third age that reconstructs a generalized regime of subjection: recurrent and reversible "humans-machines systems" replace the old nonrecurrent and nonreversible relations of subjection between the two elements; the relation between human and machine is based on internal, mutual communication, and no longer on usage or action. [p. 458]

This novel conception of subjectivity has very important social and political implications. With its rejection of universalizing theories, it opposes oppressive ideologies like Fascism and Communism. Various political initiatives like the

feminist movement, racial equality movements, homosexual rights movements, peace movements, anti-globalization movement etc., have also gained importance with the postmodern era. Here too, like its theoretical position, postmodernists do not postulate any ideal for all humanity, but criticize and oppose the existing structures that are oppressive and exploitative.

Quiz

1. Which of the following was opposed by postmodernism?
(a) Liberal humanist ideology (b) Capitalistic ideology (c) Industrial rationality (d) Secularism
2. Which of the following is not a feature of postmodernism?
(a) The disbelief in the purity of knowledge (b) Opposition to the enlightenment concept of progress (c) Advocacy of the concept of an autonomous self (d) Rejection of the idea that reason is the ultimate judge.
3. Which of the following did Structuralism emphasize?
(a) Universal rationality (b) Culture (c) Literary works (d) Human existence
4. Which of the following is not a feature of poststructuralism?
(a) Language is philosophically significant (b) The idea of constructed self (c) Belief in the possibility of rational inquiry into truth (d) Opposes the scientific pretensions of Structuralism.
5. Which of the following is not implied or suggested by the idea of constitutive otherness?
(a) The excluded or marginalized elements of the text are more important
(b) Every text exhibits an internal unity (c) Every text implies a repression
(d) The privileged theme of the text depends on the marginalized.
6. Which of the following is not applicable to the postmodern notion of subject?
(a) Rejection of self-sufficient agency (b) Autonomy (c) Rejection of universal human nature (d) Essentially fractured

Answer Key

1. [a]
2. [c]
3. [b]
4. [c]
5. [b]
6. [b]

Assignments

1. Discuss the postmodern conception of the subject.
2. Discuss some of the key features of postmodernism.

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Chapter 40

Deconstruction, Feminism and Discourse Theory

Key Words:

Deconstruction, structuralism, *différance*, conflictual nature of language, layers of meaning, extra textuality, surface meaning, interminable analysis, feminism, sexism, sexist oppression, gender justice, gender equality, discourse, social constructivism, discursive formation, power, knowledge, subject,

Introduction

Deconstruction has originated in France in the late 1960s, when structuralism and existentialism were still intellectually active. In a fundamental sense, deconstruction is associated with certain techniques for reading texts developed by Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man and some other thinkers. Another important thinker who was associated with deconstruction is Foucault, though many will not consider him as a deconstructionist in the strict sense of the term, as he was more than that. There is a wide consensus on the fact that Jacques Derrida is the chief proponent of deconstruction.

From its very outset, deconstruction challenges some fundamental assumptions of the Western metaphysical tradition. It can also be seen as a response and reaction against some important 20th century philosophical movements like the phenomenology of Husserl, structuralism of Saussure and psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan. Derrida himself affirms that deconstruction is not a method, but an activity of reading as it refers to certain new strategies for interpreting literary texts. It is also conceived as a way of criticizing political institutions.

While we discussed Heidegger's philosophy earlier, we have discussed the notion of the "destruction" of the metaphysical tradition. The idea of deconstruction owes immensely to this Heideggerian notion, though it is also substantially different from the former. While Heidegger's destruction has a definite objective—to arrive at the primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being—deconstruction is envisaged as an ongoing process, which has no such definite end point, where things are neither analyzed completely nor the final meanings are reached. Again, as Barbara Johnson observes:

Deconstruction is not synonymous with "destruction", however. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word 'analysis' itself, which etymologically means "to undo" -- a virtual synonym for "to de-construct." ...

If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not the text, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. A deconstructive reading is a reading which analyses the specificity of a text's critical difference from itself. [*The Critical Difference*]

The approach of deconstruction towards the notion of meaning is also relevant in this context. Deconstruction asserts that, texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices do not have unambiguously definite meanings, as they do not have very strict and rigid boundaries. To deconstruct, as Nancy Holland observes, “...is to take a text apart along the structural “fault lines” created by the ambiguities inherent in one or more of its key concepts or themes in order to reveal the equivocations or contradictions that make the text possible. [Holland] Before we examine these more vital features of deconstruction, let us examine the historical context that witnessed its emergence.

As mentioned above, the intellectual environment of post World War II Europe was dominated by various philosophical approaches like structuralism, phenomenology, existentialism and psychoanalysis. Structuralism was the leading cultural theory, which exerted significant influence on other social sciences. Unlike existentialism, which focuses the individual, structuralism emphasizes on the structured system and considers the latter as the locus of the real and the meaningful. As Cantor observes, this transference of meaning and authenticity from the individual to the system makes structuralism a theory that rebels against the anthropomorphism of existentialism. By giving priority to universal structures that subsume both the individual and the society, it envisages to transcend the conflict between them [Cantor, p.346] Deconstruction agrees with structuralism on this aspect. It also shares some of the political concerns of structuralism. For these reasons, deconstruction owes a lot to structuralism.

Nevertheless, there are important differences. Deconstruction is critical about the idealistic overtone of structuralism, which subscribes to the notion of common universal structures. In their search for deep universal structures, the structuralists fail to see the possibilities of critiquing and transforming the society and tend to consider the world as it is given as legitimate. Deconstruction is therefore, more radical in its approach than structuralism. Cantor adds that

deconstruction is a radical variant of structuralism: a culturally and, to some extent, politically left-wing offshoot of structuralism. [p.357]

Key Themes in Derrida's Theory

Derrida advances certain very important concepts while elucidating his theoretical position. Some of them are listed below.

- There is nothing outside or beyond the text.
- The notion of *différance*
- Every text deconstructs itself.
- The essential oppositional and conflictual nature of language.
- There is not one canonical signification to a text: there are several simultaneous layers of meaning.
- The nature of language is such that it conceals meaning.
- There are infinite meanings in the text.
- The necessity of an interminable analysis

One primary feature of deconstruction is to reject the idea of extra textuality; the notion that meaning or significance lies in some definite platform outside the text. It also asserts that one always access the text from a context. But this context nevertheless does not suggest any fixed boundary for the text. The text, asserts Derrida, is not a finished corpus of writing. He conceives the text as a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. (Derrida, *Living on: Border Lines*, pp.83-84).

The notion of *différance* does not mean just “difference”, but it indicates a combination of differences. It also indicates how the structure of the text is constituted. It suggests that the text possesses intrinsic oppositions within itself. There are different elements in any text, which prevent it from forming a unitary significance or meaning. These elements are not just different from each other but are in perpetual conflict. Such oppositions or internal conflicts are at work in each signifying text, as such conflicts or oppositions constitute the very nature of language. With these conflicts constantly at work, each text undergoes a constant deconstruction.

Deconstruction thus overthrows many traditional conceptions about textual meaning. The internal conflicts embedded in language and the text

ultimately creates ruptures in the surface meaning of the text, which leads to its immanent disintegration. Derrida argues that, due to this, the text breaks down into several layers of meaning, where none can claim prominence. Hence, the text has no single meaning. Instead, it has infinite meanings or layers of meaning. One has to be sensitive to this fact about the not apparent and unconscious multiplicity of meanings that lie behind the immediate and apparent surface.

Hence, along with the immediate message a text gives out on its surface, it also projects conflicts, which bring out the immanent gaps in the text. Such conflicts eventually unsettle any attempt to fix textual meaning to any single point. Derrida affirms that, one should focus these gaps, which according to him can be found in the margins of the text. He says that in reading he deconcentrates on those points that appear to be the most important, central or crucial and instead focus the secondary, eccentric, lateral, marginal, parasitic, borderline cases. (Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, p.44-45) there is a constant focus on what is marginal and peripheral.

He also stresses on the idea of interminable analysis. The deconstructionist criticism is an endless process, which never reaches any final goal. He conceives the perpetual overturning of meaning as the very nature of language. Since it is the nature of language, the text deconstructs itself to the reader. One important aspect of deconstruction is the fact that it is not a method that aims at finding the meaning of the text in the sense in which phenomenological analysis engages itself with things. It stresses on the infinite possibilities of reading the text and opposes any fixation of meaning. Deconstruction is one of the prominent postmodern approaches, which opposes the sanctity of metanarratives.

Feminism

Feminism can be understood as a form of resistance against all forms of patriarchal domination in all aspects of life. In other words, it aims at ending different forms of sexist oppression. It has very strong social and political implications, as it raises very important questions concerning equality and justice in human societies, most of which traditionally follow the patriarchal social order.

Historically, most human societies considered women as subordinate to men. And many religious traditions have provided theological justifications to this subordination and discrimination. Philosophical traditions were also directly or

indirectly promoting male domination. Many thinkers like Aristotle considered women as inferior to men. Feminism as an intellectual, ideological and political movement was aware of this historical context and tries to posit counterarguments by proposing theoretical frameworks that support gender justice and equality.

Historically, feminism is associated with several movements of political activism originated in different parts of the world that ultimately tried to gain equality and justice for women. The woman suffrage movements in Europe and the US during the late 19th and early 20th centuries are examples. The Women's movement of the 1960s explicitly demanded equal legal rights and political participation. In this sense, feminism defines itself positively as a movement that aims at establishing more justice and equality in human societies, which are constitutive of several forms of hierarchies. Hence, different forms of feminisms are not anti-male or mere political initiatives that seek gender equality. But feminists consider the question of gender equality as primary and envisage to create gender justice and ensure equal rights for women based on the idea of the equality of the sexes. Bell Hook states that feminists are made, not born.

This insight is important to understand feminism. In other words, it tells us how our societies are patriarchal and how both men and women contribute to the sustenance of the status co. Hence feminism cannot be anti-male, as it is not men alone who are responsible for the male-dominant and patriarchal social system. It is the way our societies are economically, politically and culturally formed and organized. As Bell Hooks observes, females were as socialized to believe sexist thinking and values as males: hence before women could change patriarchy they have to change themselves. Hence, as Bill Hook observes, to end patriarchy we need to realize that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism. Feminism therefore, has to begin with women changing themselves and not just expecting men to change their attitudes.

Though women are oppressed in human societies since time immemorial, feminism as an active ideology has originated only in recent times. Many historical and political factors are responsible for this. With the enlightenment, Europe had witnessed the emergence of liberalism, which emphasized concepts like equality, personal autonomy, rights of individuals etc. 20th century had witnessed the spread and popularity of democratic institutions and governments all over the world. All such developments prompted the development of various rights groups that argues for

justice in terms of the idea of race and gender equality. During their early phase, many feminist groups were visibly anti-men. But they soon overcame this phase and developed their respective ideologies and many of them do not consider gender equality as a matter of concern for women alone. They treat it as problem facing humanity in general.

But there are several complex challenges feminist movements face in today's world. For instance, class differences and race discriminations add new dimensions to the fundamental issue of gender discrimination and gender justice. There are differences among women in terms of economic status, education, and race etc., where all these factors determine the power relationships that permeate in the society. Again there are feminists who advocate reforms and argue for gender equality, while some others aggressively propagate social transformation through revolutionary measures. Often many of these initiatives remain within the elite classes. As Bell Hooks observes, evolutionary feminist theory was not made available to the public, as it remained as a privileged discourse available to those among us who are highly literate, well- educated, and usually materially privileged. [Hooks, p.5]

Again, there are different types of feminisms; liberal, radical, diversity, socialist, Marxist, postmodern, lesbian, eco-feminists and existentialists are a few. The liberal tradition plays a vital role in the creation of the feminist sensibilities, as they advocate values like equality and autonomy, which ultimately argue for universal human rights. The socialist feminists believe that gender and sexuality are social constructs and they argue for their transformation. While the Marxist feminists consider capitalism as the major factor in women's oppression, the lesbian feminists challenge the conception of normalcy centering around the idea of heterosexuality. The diversity feminists believe that the problems women face are different in different cultures and times and the existentialists argue that the construction of women as man's other leads to inauthentic existence. The radical feminists maintain that women's oppression can be considered as the conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression and the eco-feminists adopt more a spiritual approach.

In spite of these different approaches and theoretical frameworks, almost all groups of feminists oppose oppression, exploitation and discrimination on the basis of gender. They are all concerned about the injustice fostered by a patriarchal/hierarchical society and suggest gender equality and gender justice as

means to overcome the various problems facing, not only women but also the society in general.

Discourse Theory

Jørgensen & Phillips state that a discourse can be understood as a particular way of talking about and understanding the world or an aspect of the world. [*Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p, 1] they treat discourse analysis, as just one among several social constructionist approaches—a range of new theories about culture and society—but it is one of the most widely used approaches within social constructionism. (p.4) From the outset, the notion of discourse is based on the assumption that language is structured according to different patterns that people's utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life. Accordingly we have “medical discourse” or “political discourse”, representing different domains. Discourse analysis is the analysis of these patterns. [*Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, p. 1]

While discussing the fundamental aspects of various social constructivists, Vivien Burr formulates four premises shared by all social constructionist approaches. [pp. 2-5, referred by Jørgensen & Phillips, p. 5] Burr states that all of them adopt a critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge. Secondly, that all emphasize on historical and cultural specificity. Their approach establishes a link between knowledge and social processes and finally they all stress on the link between knowledge and social action. The social constructionists therefore, deny the idea of a reality out there and consider that the world is accessed by us only through our categories. They further acknowledge that, since we are historically and culturally situated, our knowledge about the world is also determined by this situatedness. They affirm that discourse is a form of social action that plays a part in producing the social world and our ways of understanding the world are created and maintained by social processes. [Burr, p.5]

In a basic sense, discourse theorists understand discourse as something, which is produced by social actors through their practices and are shaped by social structures. Discourses are thus consumed and monitored in this manner. The meaning of objects and actions is determined by historically specific systems of rules. As indicated above, discourse theorists do not conceive any object existing independent of discourses. The condition of the meaning of any object depends on the socially

constructed system of rules. In this sense a discourse represent a system of social relations and practices, which are nevertheless, embedded in various power relations.

As mentioned above, the discourse theorists subscribe to the view that our access to reality is always through language. Here they are in agreement with structuralism and poststructuralism. Things in the world gain meaning only in the context of a discourse. Language thus constitutes the social world, along with social identities and social relations. Therefore, the changes in the discourse are reflected in the social world.

The French philosopher Michele Foucault's contributions in the development of discourse theory and analysis are seminal. Foucault's critical approach challenges the conception of truth advocated by traditional philosophy. He views truth as a discursive construction and therefore, conceives that different regimes of knowledge determine what is true and false. According to him a discourse is a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation. He maintains that a discourse is made up of a limited number of statements and is essentially a fragment of history. [*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.117]

Foucault also advocates a theory that links power with knowledge, which explains how power is spread across different social practices, as it does not belong to particular agents such as individuals or the state or groups with particular interests. [p.13] He holds that power constitutes discourse, knowledge, bodies and subjectivities. It is responsible both for creating our social world and for the particular ways in which the world is formed and can be talked about. Therefore, power is both a productive and a constraining force. [p.14]

Another very important aspect of Foucault's discourse analysis is his theory of subject, as he argues that subjects are created in discourses. He thus questions some fundamental assumptions of the subject the Western tradition advocates. By demonstrating how the subject evolves through discursively formed social practices, Foucault shows how decentered the subject is.

Discourse theory and analysis exert significant influence in the course of the development of many philosophical theories in 20th century. Particularly, Foucault's influence was phenomenal. This method has remarkable contributions to research in the field of many social science disciplines and it has significantly influenced social and political theory.

Quiz

1. Which of the following statements are true of deconstruction?
(i) There is a definite goal for analysis (ii) It has no definite end point (iii) It aims at arriving at the primordial experiences (iv) It is an ongoing process (v) Things are analyzed completely.
(a) all the above (b) (ii), (iii) and (iv) (c) (i), (ii) and (iv) (d) (ii) and (iv)
2. Which of the following is not a concern of deconstruction?
(a) An activity of reading (b) A method of reaching the real meaning of the text (c) Strategies for interpreting literary texts (d) A way of criticizing political institutions.
3. Which of the following is done by deconstruction?
(a) Focus the central meaning of the text (b) Interminable analysis
(c) Stresses the final reading of the text (d) To reach a final analysis of the text.
4. Which of the following do the socialist feminists advocate?
(a) Capitalism is the major factor in women's oppression (b) The problems women face are different in different cultures and times (c) Gender and sexuality are social constructs (d) The construction of women as man's other leads to inauthentic existence.
5. Which feminist group believe that women's oppression can be considered as the conceptual model for understanding all other forms of oppression?
(a) Radical (b) Eco-feminism (c) Marxist (d) Socialist.
6. Which of the following is not a view held by discourse theory?
(a) Emphasizes historical and cultural specificity (b) Link between knowledge and social processes (c) Link between knowledge and social action (d) Emphasizes universal structures that constitute knowledge.

Answer Key

1. [d]
2. [b]
3. [b]

4. [c]
5. [a]
6. [d]

Assignments

1. Discuss the idea of difference advocated by deconstruction.
2. “Feminists and made and not born”. Explain.
3. Explain the concepts of discourse and discourse analysis.

References

Books

1. Burr, V. (1995) *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Sage.
2. Cantor, Norman F., *Twentieth-Century Culture: Modernism to Deconstruction*, New York, Peter Lang, 1988.
3. Derrida, Jacques, “Living on: Border Lines”, in H. Bloom et al, *Deconstruction and Criticism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.
4. Derrida, Jacques, *Limited Inc.*, Northwestern University Press, 1988.
5. Foucault, M, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge. 1972.
6. Hooks, Bell, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, Cambridge, South End Press, 2000.
7. Johnson, Barbara, *The Critical Difference*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, from Cuddon, J.A., *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, London, Blackwell, 1991.
8. Jørgensen, Marianne and Phillips, Louise, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2002.

Web Resources

1. Derrida-defining Deconstruction:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgwOjjoYtco>
2. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vgwOjjoYtco>
3. <http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/derrida/deconstruction.html>
4. <http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/derrida/rorty.html>
5. Holland, Nancy J., “Deconstruction” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/deconst/>
6. <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/jbalkin/articles/deconessay.pdf>.

9. The Basics of Socialist Feminism:
<http://www.feministezine.com/feminist/modern/THE-BASICS-OF-SOCIALIST-FEMINISM.html>
10. Radical Feminism: http://www.feministissues.com/radical_feminism.html
11. <http://www.colorado.edu/Sociology/gimenez/work/rphil.html>
12. http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Radical_feminism.html
13. <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/feminism/mar.html>
14. Kinds of Feminism, available at:
http://www.uah.edu/woolf/feminism_kinds.htm