UNIT 1   DEFINITION, SCOPE AND IMPORTANCE

Contents

1.0 Objectives
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Basic Questions
1.3 Theories of the Mind and Body
1.4 Some Significant Themes
1.5 The Basic Philosophy: Materialism?
1.6 Importance and Scope of Philosophy of Mind
1.7 Let Us Sum Up
1.8 Key Words
1.9 Further Readings and References

1.0 OBJECTIVES

• To introduce the students to the basic notions of philosophy of the mind.
• To set the stage with the basic notions of this discipline so that the students can gain further information on philosophy of the mind.
• To take up some core themes and issues of philosophy of the mind.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of mind is the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of human mind or, in other words, what it is that makes us conscious beings. The central question in the field is whether the mind is material or immaterial: Are we merely physical beings, or something more? Do we have immaterial souls that animate our bodies, or are we merely electrical activity in an organic brain?

1.2 BASIC ISSUES

The philosophy of mind is concerned with the problems associated with the functioning of the mind or brain. It tries to study the properties of the mind and its relationship with body. Such problems can take on many different aspects, for instance:
• Is the mind separate from the brain, or a by-product of it?
• Is there such a thing as a permanent self or soul?
• What is consciousness?
• Is artificial intelligence possible?

As an introduction, we can say that Philosophy of mind is a branch of philosophy that studies “the nature of the mind, mental events, mental functions, mental properties, consciousness and their relationship to the physical body, particularly the brain.” The mind-body problem, i.e., the
relationship of the mind to the body, is commonly seen as the central issue in philosophy of mind. At the same time there are other issues concerning the nature of the mind that do not involve its relation to the physical body that is studied in this course (PoM 2011).

1.3 THEORIES OF THE MIND AND BODY

In this section, we take up the issue of mind and body and give some introductory concepts that are crucial for our further reflection. In fact, Dualism and monism are the two major schools of thought that attempt to study the relationship between mind and body, which we will briefly treat here. We will also study some other related theories too.

**Dualism**

Dualism can be traced back to Plato, Aristotle and the Sankhya and Yoga schools of Hindu philosophy, but it was most precisely formulated by René Descartes in the 17th century. Dualism may be further classified into Substance Dualism and Property Dualism. Substance Dualists argue that the mind is an independently existing substance, whereas Property Dualists maintain that the mind is a group of independent properties that emerge from and cannot be reduced to the brain, but that it is not a distinct substance (PoM 2011). The dualist viewpoint divides the human being into two basic or primary substances: matter and mind. This view is, perhaps, the most natural one.

The main reasons for this are:

- It is suggested by our day-to-day experiences. It is quite common to distinguish between “my body” and “my self”, and our bodies may become injured or ill whilst our minds are active and alert. Our mental experience is also private, reinforcing the feeling that it is somehow separate.
- Strong traditional backing or the long history for such a position. Views that spring from folklore, native belief and religion can all influence our views of our self. This is sometimes done consciously – as in the religious doctrine of immortality – or subtly, through language and the way in which we refer to ourselves.

In general dualism may be further divided into two: Substance dualism and Property dualism. Substance dualism is well-established among non-philosophers and holds the view that there are two fundamentally different types of substance--physical and non-physical--and that human beings are made up of two components: physical bodies and non-physical minds. This theory has many attractions, but is now seen by many, rightly or wrongly, as old-fashioned and naïve. Property Dualism is in fact substance monist; it agrees with materialism that there are only physical substances. However, it concedes to the dualist that these substances have both physical and non-physical properties, and that the non-physical properties cannot be fully explained in purely physical terms. Although this position is intended to capture the best elements of both positions, it arguably ends up with the liabilities of both as well (PoM 2011).

As we can imagine, dualism - although, some would argue, the most common sense view - gives rise to all sorts of problems. If mind and body are separate substances, how do they interact? If mental stuff is immaterial - and therefore without quantity, weight, size, etc. - how do we know it exists? As a response to these problems, certain philosophers have argued that dualist account of
mind is unnecessarily complicated and that the problems it presents can be solved by adopting other views.

**Monism**

As opposed to Dualism, Monism is the position that mind and body are not ontologically distinct kinds of entities. This view was first advocated in Western philosophy by Parmenides in the 5th century BC and was later explored by the 17th century rationalist Baruch Spinoza. Monists may be further classified as follows (PoM 2011):

Physicalists argue that only the entities postulated by physical theory exist, and that the mind will eventually be explained in terms of these entities as physical theory continues to evolve. Idealists, unlike the physicalists, maintain that the mind is all that exists and that the external world is either mental itself, or an illusion created by the mind. Neutral monists adhere to the position that there is some other, neutral substance, and that both matter and mind are properties of this unknown substance. In opposition to substance dualism there is substance monism. It is the view that there is no distinction between the mental and physical realms, that everything is fundamentally the same. Although it is possible to argue that everything is mental, as idealism does, it is much more common to hold that everything is physical, to endorse “physicalism” or “materialism” (PoM 2011).

Most modern philosophers of mind adopt either a reductive or non-reductive physicalist position, maintaining in their different ways that the mind is not something separate from the body. These approaches have been particularly influential in the sciences, especially in the fields of sociobiology, computer science, evolutionary psychology and the various neurosciences. Reductive physicalists assert that all mental states and properties will eventually be explained by scientific accounts of physiological processes and states. Non-reductive physicalists argue that although the brain is all there is to the mind, the predicates and vocabulary used in mental descriptions and explanations are indispensable, and cannot be reduced to the language and lower-level explanations of physical science. Continued neuro-scientific progress has helped to clarify some of these issues. However, they are far from having been resolved, and modern philosophy of mind continues to ask how the subjective qualities and the intentionality (aboutness) of mental states and properties can be explained in naturalistic terms (PoM 2011).

Other philosophers, however, adopt a non-physicalist position which challenges the notion that the mind is a purely physical construct. Besides the two general schools discussed above, there are also other related ones as given below.

**Behaviourism**

The philosophical theory of behaviourism - or, to give its full title, logical behaviourism - holds that being in a mental state (such as being happy) is the same as being in a physical state. In other words, since all that we can know about another person's state of mind is through their behaviour, there is nothing else. Logical behaviourists believe that any statement about the internal or private world of individuals may be translated into a statement about publicly observable actions. For instance, if I say, "I am happy", this may be translated into a description of my physical state - increased heart rate, smiling, etc. If none of these things were present - the behaviourist would argue - then the person is not really happy. Obviously, emotions are not
always accompanied by extravagant outward signs, but even quieter forms of emotional or mental state must be translatable into some form of physical condition.

**Functionalism**

It is currently the most popular theory of mind. This is mostly due to the influence of computers on modern society - both in scientific terms and in the popular imagination through films, books, etc. As a result, most people presented with the functionalist perspective - though they would probably not know it by that term - would accept it common sense (PO 2011).

But what exactly is the functionalist perspective? Functionalism tries to move beyond Behaviourism. Functionalism is generally taken to be a materialist theory with the following characteristics:

1. Brain states are not mental states. Identity Theory supposes that brain states are identical to mental states. However, there are problems with this. If I say, "I am in pain" it is not the same as saying, "The C-fibres in my brain are firing". But, if mental states and brain states are identical, shouldn't these two statements mean the same thing? If not, and certain types of neurological process cannot be matched up with certain types of mental state, then something over and above simple physical processes must be taking place.

2. Behaviourism cannot account for mental states. Behaviourism attempts to account for the mind in terms of actual or possibly observable behaviour. However, the problem with this view is that:
   a) Different behaviours can result from the same stimulus. Imagine that you hear the doorbell - how do you react? Perhaps you run to answer it because you are expecting an important visitor; perhaps you ignore it; etc. In other words, there is no one response that can be linked to the same stimulus. So, if this is the case, what causes us to behave differently? The non-behaviourist would answer that it is our beliefs. However, this is a problem for the behaviourist in that it presupposes something that cannot be explained simply in terms of actual or possible behaviour (PO 2011).
   b) Different stimuli can produce the same response. As with the previous example, it is also difficult to say that there is a definite relationship between a certain type of stimulus and a certain response. For example, someone might laugh at someone falling over, seeing a photograph or from hearing a story - whilst someone else might not laugh at any of those things. In other words, there is no certain, one-to-one relationship between a stimulus and a response. If this is so, must we again say that beliefs are responsible for this?

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**Check Your Progress I**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is philosophy of mind?

2) Give your comments on property dualism.
1.4 SOME SIGNIFICANT THEMES

After having briefly seen the relationship between mind and body as expressed through various theories, we shall take up some of the main issues in Philosophy of Mind. They necessarily form part of any serious philosophical discussion on mind and knowledge of them will initiate us better into philosophy of mind.

**Personal Identity**

Theories of personal identity attempt to explain what makes a person the same person over time. What is it that ensures that I am the same person now as I was many years ago? The two main approaches to personal identity propose criteria based on bodily continuity and on psychological continuity respectively. What makes a person the same person over time is thus taken to be the fact their body, or their mind, persists through time (PMInfo 2011). An alternative view, however, denies that there is a self that exists over time. Bundle theory holds that we are nothing more than a collection of mental states example, that there is no self over and above these mental states that possesses them.

**Bodily Continuity**

What makes my pen the same pen as it was yesterday? There are other, qualitatively identical pen, that are not my pen, so it cannot be anything to do with the qualities that it possesses. Plausibly, what makes my pen my pen is that it is possible to trace a line through space following its location from one time to the other, that there is no discontinuity in its physical location (PMInfo 2011). The bodily continuity criterion for personal identity suggests that we apply this approach to personal identity. What makes me the same person as I was ten years ago, then, on this approach, is that it is possible to trace a line through space following the location of my body.

**Mind-Body Interaction**

The problem of mind-body interaction is a problem faced by adherents of substance dualism. If, as dualists claim, the mind and the body are two distinct substances, then the question arises as to how the two interact. Answering this difficult question is the problem. It appears both that mental events cause physical events and that physical events cause mental events. My beliefs and desires, for example, which are mental states, cause me to act in certain ways. Similarly, what happens to my physical body often has an effect on how I think and feel. This common sense view is called interactionism.
Problems with interactionism have led some to resort to epiphenomenalism. Epiphenomenalism holds that mind-body interaction only occurs in one direction: from the physical to the mental. According to epiphenomenalists, physical events give rise to mental events, but not the other way around (Crane & Patterson 2000). Epiphenomenalism may avoid some of the problems of dualism, but it does not avoid all of them. To avoid all of the problems, it seems, one must take a further step and endorse parallelism, denying that the mind and the body interact at all. The cost of parallelism, though, is arguably too high for the benefits that it offers. Interactionism, despite its difficulties, is the most plausible theory of mind-body interaction available to the dualist (PMInfo 2011).

The Problem of Other Minds

Why should other minds be a problem? Well, though the problem has many aspects it mainly concerns the difficulties that arise when we consider the experiences of other people. I may say that I know my own mind better than anyone else – or at least I am in the best position to. I have what is philosophically called “privileged access”. All this means it that I have a unique relationship to the contents of my own mind and mental experience, a form of access that no one else can have (unless, possibly, they are telepathic…). This is fine, so far. But the problem arises when I try to imagine what it is like to be someone else. The recent film, Being John Malkovich (PMInfo 2011), imagined that it was possible to enter the mind of another person, to see through their eyes, feel their emotions, etc. However, in real life, it is not possible to do this, so how can we really know that other people experience the world in the same way?

Another, more radical aspect of the problem concerns the existence of minds in other people at all. This sceptical problem argues that not only is it impossible to know what another person is thinking/feeling, but also that they actually think and feel. Although few people actually intend this argument to be taken seriously – along the lines of a Hollywood horror film – it does raise important points: what do we base our knowledge of other people on? On what basis do we interpret their actions? How can we claim knowledge of what others think and feel? (Gertler & Shapiro 2007).

1.5 THE BASIC PHILOSOPHY: MATERIALISM?

The theory of choice for many scientists of philosophy of mind is materialism, which denies the existence of strange, non-physical substances and insists that we are entirely physical beings. Materialist theories attempt to reduce mentality to physicality, analysing mental states in terms of physical states.

In the simplest terms, materialism is the theory that a man consists solely of organized matter—there is nothing nonmaterial constituting a part of him. Stated in these terms, behaviorism is a form of materialism, for the behaviorist thinks that a man is just a body which operates— in a very sophisticated manner. However, the behaviorist does not hold to what would generally be described as a materialist theory of mind. He does not, that is, think that minds are physical objects, for he does not think that they are objects at all (Robinson 1976).
This is the point that Gilbert Ryle emphasised in his *The Concept of Mind*. He thinks that regarding mind as a substance is a category mistake. The behaviorist does not regard minds as objects; for him, to say that something has a mind is simply to say that it behaves in a certain way. Those who hold a materialist theory of mind agree with the dualistic position against Ryle that the mind is an object, but they think it is a physical object—usually part of the central nervous system. Materialism can be stated in terms of substances or in terms of properties. It might be said that man is no more than a physical object; it might be said that he possesses only physical properties, where “physical property” is taken as including what would be so called according to common sense and those properties that figure in the basic nature sciences—that is, physics and chemistry. In saying this, we do not exclude emergent laws or concepts which describe the overall properties of the aggregate (Robinson 1976).

Today there are many other philosophers of mind, who are not materialists in the crude form. According to them we can very well have a non-dualistic philosophy of the mind, that does not reduce everything to its physical or material aspects.

**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:** Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the problem of Other Minds?

2) Is materialism a pre-requisite for philosophy of mind?

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**1.6 IMPORTANCE AND SCOPE OF PHILOSOPHY OF MIND**

Within philosophy, the philosophy of mind is easily the most active sub-discipline today. It is virtually impossible to pick up any mainstream philosophy journal without finding one or more article on some topic in philosophy of mind. Its importance can be seen from the fact that it is not just one of the youngest of the new disciplines in philosophy, but is the most scientifically advanced and multi-disciplinary.

**Scientific basis**

This discipline takes into account the latest findings of recent scientific disciplines like neuroscience, artificial intelligence, anthropology, sociobiology, etc. (See the next unit for more information). It is therefore constantly evolving in pace with the latest scientific findings.
Multi-disciplinary approach
The discipline of philosophy of mind is truly a multi-disciplinary one. Taking data from various other fields of science, philosophers reflect on the significance of mind and its unique role in shaping human life and destiny.

Philosophical Anthropology and Philosophy of Mind
We may agree with the philosopher Paul Ricoeur that “every understanding is self-understanding.” He was referring to human quest for knowledge and understanding. Every time a human person acquires more knowledge and understands something deeper, one is also improving one’s own self-understanding. In this sense understanding others (persons and things) add to one’s own self-understanding. Seen thus, everything we study, particularly in philosophy, contributes to my self-understanding. Seen from this perspective, the whole philosophy is an attempt to answer the basic philosophical question: “Who am I”? In this sense we can claim that philosophy is basically anthropology. And philosophy of mind is the equivalent of philosophical anthropology in the continental traditions. Thus the scope of Philosophy of Mind may be regarded as that of Philosophical Anthropology itself.

Significance of Philosophy to solve our problems
Considering philosophy — for some the "royal discipline" per se — we can claim that she has forcefully regarded the problems that humanity has been facing. But, she has given her resources first and foremost to ethical considerations. Because of this an ethics has — admittedly not undisputed — developed as a new special ethics. But philosophy has a larger role to play in solving humanity’s problems, than ethics (Lowe 2000).

One has to agree that today, unfortunately, philosophical anthropology has lost much of her charisma, especially in the analytical philosophy or in the Anglo-Saxon world. It is particularly this deficient situation we need to consider. Then we can see the role of philosophical anthropology in particular and philosophy in general, in dealing with the many problems we face. For this philosophical anthropology has to give up her trait as an indifferent observer by concentrating on her own qualities and, above all, by trying to prepare the ground for a meaningful, critical and creative anthropology (as one of other anthropological special disciplines) who could work closely together with a philosophy of technique. Of course, it is not simple to achieve this. The first significant condition is that philosophical anthropology has to defend herself against the accusation of being an accomplice of "anthropocentrism" because the last named can be unanimously regarded as one of the responsible for environmental disasters. The second is that she has to demonstrate her inherent capacity on enlightening reflections and interpretations on the problems faced by humanity. We need to move away from "anthropocentrism" that was characterise of earlier thinking and embrace a “cosmocentrism” keeping in mind the needs of our present world. That is why philosopher Hans Jonas speaks of a principle of responsibility in dealing with our contemporary situation (Jonas, Böhler, & Hoppe 1994). He adds: "We existentially need the threat by such a concept of man that will frighten and by being frightened we must find out the true concept of man".

In this process, our self-understanding or our "concept of man" is crucial in dealing with the threats humanity faces today. So we need to evolve constructive concepts of man in order to help ourselves. Philosophy of mind, though separate from and related to philosophical anthropology,
gives new terms and categories to philosopher to analyse the problems and offer solutions. It
gives more precise definitions to philosophical anthropology and is based on current scientific
findings. Thus Philosophy of Mind can truly help us realise our own uniqueness thus serve us in
making our lives better.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How is the philosophy of mind related to philosophical anthropology of continental tradition?

2) How can Philosophy of mind help us in solving our problems?

1.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we saw the basic introduction to the philosophy of mind. We first took up some
basic issues like dualism and monism that describes mind’s relation to the body. Then we took
up some significant themes. Then we concluded with the importance and scope of philosophy of
mind.

1.8 KEYWORDS

Epiphenomenalism: It holds that mind-body interaction only occurs in one direction: from the
physical to the mental. According to epiphenomenalists, physical events give rise to
mental events, but not the other way around.

Anthropocentrism: It is the philosophical mistake of regarding humans as the central element of
the universe.

1.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


Chennakesavan, S. Concept of Mind in Indian Philosophy. Columbia, Mo: South Asia Books,
1980.


