

THE CONCEPT OF MIND IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

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There are several definitions of mind in Western philosophy, according to various schools of thought. Materialism asserts that there is just physical matter and that the mind is a byproduct of it. Epiphenomenalism is the name of this viewpoint. Mind is just a 'glow' or shadow of matter that manifests under certain circumstances, whereas matter is the actual substance. As a result, the materialism school eliminates the mind as a fundamental reality. Idealism defines the mind as an independent, immaterial reality.

According to this perspective, known as psychical monism, the mind is the main reality, and matter is reduced to secondary significance, if not entirely denied.

Paul Brunton said:

When we take the mind out of the image of the world, we also take out space and time, effectively destroying it. A mind must exist in the world, or the world cannot exist at all. Every object that is seen requires a seer. In other words, every piece of information is known by someone.

The ideology of Neutral Monism states that everything in nature is composed of a neutral material, from which both physical and mental matter are derived. There are two distinct components to every person: the mind and the body. Mind is defined as a substance with no physical location. It is known as the locus, center, or owner of ideas, emotions, and sensory experiences. Body, however, is the place where every bodily shift occurs.

(1) The Mind as Matter

Materialism holds that nothing but matter exists. The early Greek philosophy holds this perspective. Thales, who is regarded as the first philosopher in Western tradition, believed that everything is made up of water in one way or another. Air, fire, and earth took the place of water in the minds of philosophers who came after Thales. The new concept nous (mind), which arranges all other things in their proper order, initiates and governs their movement, was introduced by another philosopher, Anaxagorus. He referred to the mind as "the best and purest of all things." He regarded the mind as a unique sort of material matter, not as an immaterial substance. However, it was Leucippus of Miletus and his disciple Democritus who first presented materialism in a tangible way in the fifth century BC. They claim that reality is made up entirely of an endless number of atoms moving through empty space, each with its own form, size, and impenetrability. All of the characteristics, relationships, and other elements of the cosmos are determined by the form, size, position, and movement of these atoms. The diverse properties and relationships of the atoms make up things like feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. The issue of what actual explanation should be provided for phenomena like thoughts, sensations, feelings, memories, perceptions, and intentions is still open. Eliminative

Materialism, Behaviourism, and Identity Theory are the most well-known viewpoints in this area.

(a) Eliminative Materialism

This perspective holds that sensations, perceptions, and emotions do not exist. These are merely intricate manifestations of matter in motion, even if they exist. It should be noted that despite the possibility that the philosophers used words that allude to such items, there are no further entities being posited beyond the physical ones. The central thesis of Eliminative Materialism is that the popular understanding of the mind is wrong and that certain classes of mental states in which the majority of people believe do not exist. Many common psychological notions, like belief and desire, are poorly defined, thus there is no clear neurological foundation for them. By lowering them to the biological level, the psychological notions of behavior and experience are evaluated.

(b) behaviorism

This perspective holds that every word pertaining to a mental entity refers to a person's behavior or deeds. That is, experiencing pain means to scream, writhe, and the like, or to have the potential for such conduct. To want food is to either consume it if it is available or to be inclined to seek it out if it is not, and the same applies to all the behaviors and circumstances that are referred to as mental.

The logic behind behaviorism is that all mental concepts are equivalent in meaning to some behavioral term, and that the meanings of the words that describe the mind, its mental states, and its actions are examined in behavioral terms. According to it, behavior may be explained scientifically without appealing to speculative concepts like the mind or inner psychological occurrences. The distinction between publicly observable behaviors (like deeds) and privately observable processes (like thoughts and emotions) is not philosophical.

(c) The Theory of Mind and Identity

Mind-Brain identity theory or identity theory is a theory that claims that mental states are identical to the physical occurrences in the brain. In other words, certain physical occurrences in the brain are identical to mental events. It does not argue that the mind and the brain are the same thing. Distinguishing between the mind and brain involves recognizing mental and brain processes and states. Think about having a mental image, experiencing pain, or seeing something. According to the identity theory, these encounters are not only associated with brain activity but are actually brain activity itself.

(II) The immaterial nature of the mind

Plato was the first Western philosopher to state that the mind is an intangible entity, distinct from the body and capable of existing independently. According to Plato, the mind (psyche) controls the body and dictates its actions. Plato thought that both physical and nonphysical things existed. According to Descartes' philosophy, which maintains that mind and matter are two distinct and separate types of substances that are utterly opposed in their nature and capable of existing independently of one another, the clearest articulation of dualism is found there.

The principal idea in Descartes was the primacy of consciousness, which is the notion that the mind knows itself more immediately and directly than it can know anything else. The mind can only comprehend the material outside world through the impressions that the external world makes on it in the form of sensation and perception. Descartes believes that all philosophy starts with the individual mind, and his first assertion is stated in the sentence "I think, therefore I am" (cogito ergo sum). Since the dualist approach exacerbates several problems in explaining the relationship between mind and body (matter), some of the philosophers who believed mind to be immaterial did not support it. Berkeley was one of these thinkers, who believed that all things are mental, made of the same stuff as dreams, and that there is no such thing as matter. This perspective might exist in two different forms. The reality is either that there is just one huge, all-encompassing intellect, or that there are many.

Berkeley's view is referred to as Subjective Idealism, while the previous position is known as Absolute Idealism.

The philosophical school of Absolute Idealism was emphasized by Immanuel Kant and other German philosophers like Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. According to the English philosopher Bradley, there is just one Infinite Mind that encompasses all of reality, not a plurality of minds.

(III) Neutral Monism

According to another school of thought, neither the psychological nor the physical is truly basic.

Each is a facet of a fundamental reality that exists between the mental and the physical. This perspective refutes the idea that there is a fundamental difference between the mind and the body. According to neutral monism, the universe is made up of only one type of substance: neutral elements that are neither mental nor physical in nature. These neutral components resemble sensory experiences in that they may possess the characteristics of color and form as they are perceived. However, a mind viewed as a real entity does not include these colored and molded components. Neutral elements exist, and the mind is composed of a subset of these that may also be seen as a collection of empirical observations of the items in the world. Actually, it's only a question of arranging the neutral elements in various ways, based on either a physical or mental viewpoint. Spinoza was one of the philosophers who held such beliefs. He said that the underlying substance is God, who embraces all of reality, and that the material and mental realms are just God's characteristics. The mind is not made of matter, nor is the material world mental. God and matter and intellect are the two aspects through which this one entity expresses itself, not two separate things. Spinoza says:

Because the mind and body are inseparable in their choices, wants, and choices, the body cannot tell the mind what to think, and the mind cannot tell the body whether to be at rest or in motion.

David Hume and A.J. Ayer have provided alternative methods. They claim that there are a number of specific things that they refer to as "experiences." The laws of association and memory, among others, dictate how some of these experiences influence minds, while the laws of perception dictate how some of them influence bodies.

Thus, the mind is viewed as simply the sum of a person's experiences, while a physical thing is considered to be merely the sum of the experiences that one may have of it.

(IV) Opinions of Contemporary Philosophers

(a) Philosophers of language

According to the Linguistic philosophers, the distinction between the mind and the body is based on two distinct language or conceptual systems. The physical reality is the conceptual language with its spatiotemporal words, while the human conversation refers to standards for judging the rationality, moral accountability, and ethical worth of human behavior. According to Gilbert Ryle:

In one logical tone of voice, it is perfectly acceptable to state that there are minds, while in another logical tone of voice, it is perfectly acceptable to argue that there are bodies.

These words reflect two distinct understandings of existence rather than two separate species of existence. Gilbert Ryle claims that capacity or potentiality is a fictitious thing. Saying that glass is fragile simply means that it breaks under certain circumstances, not that there is some mysterious inner ability for it to do so. In the same way, dispositional words like intelligent, rational, etc. merely indicate that someone behaves in specific ways under particular circumstances, rather than suggesting that anyone has any disposition or ability. As a result, the occurrent, which indicates current traits, can take the place of the dispositional categories. The present mental state indicates some activity rather than being a mysterious trait. One is considered conscious, alert, and so forth when one acts or behaves in specific observed manners. Thinking, feeling, and willing are deliberate actions that are done in a very obvious way, not covertly.

By limiting the tendencies to observable external acts, Ryle avoids using words that suggest internal, mental processes. It is frequently assumed that overt acts are caused by mental acts. Since thinking leads to thoughtful behavior, joy or rage leads to joyful or angry behavior, and volition leads to voluntary conduct. The challenges of such a thesis are highlighted by Ryle. For instance, it is impossible to explain how an intentional, conscious inner action might result in a completely different, unconscious overt outcome. Additionally, there is no evidence to suggest that the outer behavior is preceded by an inner act. In addition, if it is assumed that the prior mental act is the cause of the external action, then the prior mental act must be caused by a second mental act, and so on indefinitely. Therefore, the hypothesis that external acts are caused by internal mental processes may be avoided.

(b) Pragmatism

Additionally, pragmatism departs from mainstream psychology, which posits that the mind is a static entity. In light of recent advances in biology and physiology, William James argued that the study of the mind should be conducted empirically. As a result, the mind becomes a term for the human experience that is evolving and developing over time. Experience is not just the experience of basic feelings that are externally connected by specific associative rules, but rather experience is a continuous flow of consciousness from which the mind chooses and

extracts specific pieces in the sake of survival. The mind is not a blank slate, but rather fundamentally active and selective, with its several stages simply representing the individual organism's attempts to protect its many interests in its fight for survival. Will, not passive thought, and action, not cognition, is the essential nature of the mind. Perceiving is not replicating or depicting reality, but rather reacting to and acting upon it, which is also altered and transformed by the mind.

(c) Phenomenology and Existentialism

Additionally, the opinions of linguistic philosophers are shared by existentialist and phenomenological philosophers. General observations of man's situation in the world, rather than linguistic factors, support their views. He has a physical form that he experiences and that, in turn, influences his experiences. Man is, however, a creature who alters himself by the choices he makes, who establishes values, who lives his life in accordance with these values, but who ultimately has the option of acting contrary to his values and even choosing to end his own life. These thinkers reject the dominance of 'essence' over 'existence'. The inherent universal nature (such as rationality or humanity) that is shared by all people or by specific members of a group (such as Ram, Sham) is referred to as essence. The reality of a person's existence is connected to their actual being. Essence is a universal possibility, while existence is an individual, authentic thing that belongs to a certain time and place. While existence may be understood through direct experience, essence can only be conceived. They place the highest importance on the individual over the universal, and in particular, on the consciousness as personally experienced and felt over the academic notion of the mind as a physical entity.

(d) Functionalism

This is a theory of the mind in contemporary philosophy that was created as an alternative to behaviorism and identity theory of the mind. According to the main tenet of this theory, the practical function of mental states (beliefs, desires, etc.) is the only factor that determines them. Functionalism highlights that the defining characteristic of a specific type of mental state is determined by its function or the part it plays within the system it belongs to, rather than by its internal makeup. Aristotle's notion of the soul includes this theory. In Hobbes's notion of the mind as a "calculating machine," it has a past. In contrast to Plato's theory that the soul can exist apart from the body, Aristotle believed that the human soul is the form of a natural, well-ordered human body. Its fundamental "whatness," which Aristotle defines as the ability to fulfill the function or purpose that defines it as the sort of thing it is, is expressed by its sets of powers or capabilities.

In summary, the mind, as an integral component of the human body, plays a crucial role in the formation of human character. Different schools of thought in Indian and Western philosophy have given it different definitions. Indian philosophy has placed a strong emphasis on realizing the Ultimate Reality inside the deepest recesses of one's own self, so its goal is to facilitate this realization by comprehending the nature of mental modifications and proposing strategies for their cessation.

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