5.1 INTRODUCTION

What constitutes the self – is it consciousness or body or both? Is there any relation between consciousness and the body or is it possible for the phenomenon of consciousness to exist without the body i.e. to have a disembodied existence? These questions fall under the purview of the mind and the body problem and it is the broad area of research that this work is concerned with. In this study, I have attempted to dig out the thoughts of the eminent philosophers across the ages on the above mentioned questions in order to reach the desired end of knowing the ‘self’.

The inquiry regarding the concept of the self has revealed to us that the inquisitiveness to understand it is a primitive one. A study of the Western Philosophy reveals that there has been no straight answer to this age old and seemingly simple query regarding the human self. In the ancient times the notion of the self was deeply influenced by the ethico-religious considerations of the people, prevalent at that time and the soul-body split was maintained as an article of faith for many centuries. It was characterized by the lack of critical considerations and absence of scientific knowledge. But man’s inherent rationality could not support the primitive, dogmatic and orthodox beliefs about the self for a long time. It was the ancient Greek philosophers who for the very first time opened their doors to rational and intellectual speculations on the self and the world. The whole of the Western Philosophy including the Philosophy of mind began with the Greek philosophers. The study of the early Greek philosophy reveals that it was during this period of time that ideas regarding the nature of the self started budding which would, in the course of time, dominate the later Philosophy of mind. The philosophical systems of Plato and Aristotle can be said to be pioneers of two distinctive viewpoints in the Philosophy of mind. Even though there were no organized branch of study called Philosophy of Mind during that period, yet, the topics now considered central to the Philosophy of Mind were often discussed under the title ‘Psyches’ or the ‘Soul’. The ancient Greeks
were the first to suggest that there is a ‘true reality’ i.e. ‘noumenon’ under an ‘apparent’ reality i.e. ‘phenomenon’ — an unseen real beneath what can be seen. The question is – what is the nature of this true reality? Is it material in nature i.e. embodied or non-material i.e. something spiritual or mental? Materialism and idealism were the two extreme viewpoints regarding the true nature of the self and they still constitute the two extreme ends in between which our notion of self fluctuates. Thus both materialistic and the idealistic views are the legacy of the ancient period i.e. the time of the evolution of organized human thought process.

5.2 GREEK PERIOD

The hypothesis that the soul and the body are separable dates back to Greek philosophy. The whole mind-body problem can be said to owe its existence to Greek’s belief system that thinking is the domain of the mind. The polarities between which mind-body fluctuates were concretized by Plato and Aristotle. The Platonic tradition believed that human beings are not unified substances, but a combination of two distinct substances – a mortal body and an immortal soul. He is the initiator of the modern distinction between mind and matter. With him an organized form of dualism can be said to have originated. Descartes’ conception of human beings as two one-sided things – a mind and a body can be ideally called as the heir to the Platonic tradition. But Aristotle, on the contrary, held that a human being is a unified substance, the soul being the form of the body. To describe that form is to describe the characteristic powers of human beings, in particular the distinctive powers of intellect and will that characterize the rational soul. The idea that every living organism has a ‘form’ – characterized the soul not as an entity separate from the body but more akin to an array of powers and capacities exhibited by living things established the paradigm for sophisticated speculation on the relationship of the mental to the physical. According to Aristotle, a living creature is a substance. He believed that the Body = Matter and Soul= Form. The soul (psyche) is the structure of the body – its functions and organization. With time, Aristotle’s early biological conjectures were modified by subsequent scientific research but his philosophical views continued as the basis for theoretical discussion until the arrival of Descartes.
Study of the historical perspective has brought to light the fact that dualism can be held responsible for withholding us to accept the idea of a unified self constituted of both consciousness and the body. It would not have been the case if instead of following Plato which ultimately led to the Cartesian shadow lands we would have instead sought out the Aristotelian sunlight, where we could have seen things in a better light. It would have been far better to adopt Aristotelian notion of totality i.e. human beings as ensouled creatures. The need, thus, was to adopt the notion of wholeness of human beings with different attributes. The conceptions of division that has been rooted in the Platonic and Cartesian tradition should have been repudiated. Human beings on the contrary should have been treated as animals endowed with such capacities that confer upon them, in the form of life that is natural to them, the status of persons. Aristotle propagated the idea that every living organism is endowed with an array of powers or capacities exhibited by living things. Of course Aristotle’s notion too was not without its share of flaws. But what is important was his conception of a human being as a whole being. Going back to Aristotelian idea of totality of the human being would definitely get philosophers out of the clutches of Cartesianism by giving them a more rational option.

The views of Plato and Aristotle continued to dominate thoughts about the self for a long time. Virtually no progress in the area of the study of the self was made in Christian Europe for about thousand years. Philosophical thoughts such as it was, were dominated by the dead hand of Plato and Aristotle until the rebirth of learning occurred and an entirely new set of scientific ideas ultimately came to replace the inadequate medieval mindsets. By the beginning of the early seventeenth century, the ethico-religious centric concept of the ‘self’ propounded by the Greek philosophers took a back seat and the evolution of a new thought process heralded. Of course, the deep impressions of Platonic dualism and Aristotelian monism on the early modern philosophers need to be acknowledged.

5.3 MODERN AGE

It is to Descartes that we owe the beginning of a systematic account of the mind and body relationship. With him the soul morphs into a ‘mental substance’ and the mind becomes identified with thinking and immediate self-awareness. He showed a new freshness in
thought which was carried on by his successors. He created a dualistic scheme with which the contemporary Philosophy of mind is still in various ways occupied. The dualism of mind and body propounded by him created such a vigorous influence that all the subsequent theories of mind emerged as a reaction – either as an appreciation or as criticism against the substance theory of the self propounded by him.

Descartes’ project of accounting for the relation between the mind and the world is epistemological in nature. It is epistemological in the sense that his mind and body dualism came about as a result of his search for indubitable truth or a grounded knowledge of reality. By focusing on the problem of true and certain knowledge, he made the epistemological question of the relationship between the mind and the world the starting point of his philosophy. The certain knowledge about the existence of ‘I’ is according to him the stopping point of all doubts. Descartes defined the indubitable existence of ‘I’ in terms of thoughts and then thoughts in terms of awareness or consciousness. The context in which Descartes asked the question – ‘what am I?’ indicates that it is something like the notion of the self that he had in mind. He seemed not so much interested in an analysis of consciousness as such. He was not directly delving at it but whatever idea of consciousness we have today of Descartes is just an aftermath of his concept of self. He provides one of the purely psychological usages of the concept of consciousness when he defines thought in terms of consciousness. However he does not provide us an analysis of the concept. Rather he employs the concept in a way that grounds his epistemic claims.

He famously held that while the essence of the body is spatial extension, the essence of the mind is thought. The mental and the spatial are mutually exclusive categories. His view is often described as substance dualism where the soul is distinct from the body but is united with the body. Cartesian dualism has argued for a view of the self as the subject of experience, according to which the facts about the body cannot provide logically sufficient ground for inference concerning the self. The existence of the body can be doubted but the soul’s existence is immune to doubts. Hence, the two cannot be the same. In holding that he was solely a thinking thing Descartes excludes body from his essential nature. The embodied being called a person, is actually a combination of two distinct and independent substances, the soul
– a spiritual substance and the body – a material substance. Thinking cannot be attributed to the body i.e. the material substance and extension cannot be attributed to the soul i.e. the spiritual substance. He held that the human mind in its essential nature is not dependent on the physical world. Mind does not require a corporeal embodiment. He is widely interpreted as regarding the non-physical substance of the mind to be what a person essentially is, the body being a mere excrescence, no more necessary to a human being per se than the clothes one wears. So, according to Descartes the real ‘I’ is something outside the material world altogether, an immaterial substance or soul temporarily inhabiting in the body. This is Descartes dualism – it is proposition that there is an unextended place called the mind that acts upon the extended things in the brain.

Descartes dualism contradicts the common sense notion of the self that we all nurture. Don’t we use the ‘mind’ (non-spatial) and the ‘brain’ (spatial) interchangeably? The mind appears to be a part of the body. If the mind and the body are entirely distinct from each other then how can the non-material minds influence the material body? How can mind be localized in the body? Why does consciousness vary with variation in the bodily states? Innumerable questions are what mind-body dualism of Descartes leads to.

By focussing the problem of true and certain knowledge, Descartes had made the relationship between the mind and the world the starting point of Philosophy and thereby brought to the forefront the mind-body problem. By localizing the soul’s contact with the body in the pineal gland, Descartes had raised the question of the relationship of the mind to the brain and the nervous system. Yet, at the same time, by drawing a radical ontological distinction between the body as extended and mind as pure thought, Descartes, in search of certitude, had paradoxically created intellectual chaos.

After Descartes, Locke took an entirely different route which lead to an equally confusing conception of the self. What sets Locke apart from Descartes is that he did not subscribe to the idea of innate ideas and instead opted for empiricism. Locke’s route to know the self was psychological rather than epistemological. He focused on the psychological realm, with an aim to explore the domain of human
understanding. His basic concern was with the issue of identity and diversity involved in the concept of a ‘person’ or ‘self’.

In Locke’s philosophy, consciousness is very important because it is the identity of consciousness that determines the identity of persons. He famously makes use of consciousness in his theory of ‘personal identity’. He held that our mind can be defined only in terms of it being conscious. Identity of a person is the identity of consciousness. One remains the same person if one is conscious of being so despite the changes that a body might undergo. The identity of the self is founded on consciousness of past events (memory) and not on the substance of either the soul or the body. So, consciousness plays an extremely important role in Locke’s conception of a ‘person’ or ‘self’. Thoughts are elements of consciousness. Since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes everyone to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity.

He believed in the independent existence of bodies as he was a realist. Regarding the role that the human body plays in the identity of the self, he argued that self-identity is not based on bodily identity. Body may undergo changes while the self remains the same. So, Locke’s conception of the self does not necessarily require any substance or body but is founded in the existence of the same continued consciousness. Therefore, according to him the self is that conscious thinking thing – whatever substance it is made up of (whether spiritual or material, simple or compounded, it matters not) – which is sensible or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as consciousness extends.

In modern times, in the context of discussions regarding mind and body, we generally subscribe to the idea where the brain is equated with the body. Locke would have never subscribed to such an idea. But in such a case, question arises as to what forms the physical basis of Locke’s consciousness. If it is immaterial as is seems to be than his theory of self falls prey to the same loopholes that Descartes theory of self is vulnerable to. Also consciousness of the past or memory which forms the foundation
of his concept of self is questionable because when we talk of memory it is always constituted of the experiences of our previous bodied existences. Can there be any memory of disembodied existences? What kind of memories they would be? It isn’t clear what his conception of consciousness or identity conditions for consciousness exactly is.

Locke’s notion of the criterion of personal identity has received a great deal of attention in the recent times, largely because of some remarks by Wittgenstein that an “An ‘inner process’ stands in need of an outward criteria”\(^1\). In modern time’s dissatisfaction with the Lockean account combined with Wittgensteinian views about the necessity of outward and observable criteria for psychological processes have led philosophers to emphasize on the bodily factors as criterion of personal identity. So, Locke’s notion of the self can be alleged of overemphasizing consciousness and totally neglecting the body.

Spinoza’s philosophy can be seen as a reaction to Descartes’ philosophy i.e. an attempt to solve the problems it created, particularly those surrounding the mind and body. Contrary to Descartes dualism, he vouched for substance monism. According to him Descartes’ mind and matter are not substances at all, if at all substance is to be defined in terms of self-subsistence. If we go by the definition of substance than according to Spinoza, apart from substance itself, everything else is a modification or mode of a substance. So mind and body are different ways of conceptualizing what is actually the same thing and hence substance monism is the right perspective. The body is a finite mode of the one and the same substance considered under the attribute of extension and the mind is the mode of that very substance considered under the attribute of thought. Mind and body are not two distinct entities, but different ways of considering one and the same thing – as having certain physical characteristics, or as having certain ideas. Each mind is itself an idea with a particular object – in the case of humans, the mind is the idea of the body, and whatever happens in the body will be represented in the mind. His theory is a part of psycho-physical parallelism. There is no need for Descartes’ doctrine of substantial union since union is a part of Spinoza’s system.

\(^1\) Ludwig Wittgenstein, op. cit., p.129.

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It is important to stress the unqualified nature of this conceptualization that every single thing may be conceived as thinking or extended. This means that not only God is conceivable as thinking or extended but also humans, animals, plants, stars, rocks and any other entity one might contemplate. Here is where the problem arises: while most of us will unhesitatingly agree that humans think as well as at least some other existing things, an equal number of us unhesitatingly will reject the notion that rocks and many other things think.

But despite the loopholes in Spinoza’s system it cannot be denied that his idea of a single thing is capable of both the attributes of thinking as well as extension is extremely important. His view is somewhat like Aristotle in this regard. Due to his monistic views he does not face the problem of interaction between mind and matter which haunts dualism. In modern terms Spinoza’s idea can be interpreted as that there is a single series of events, which can be considered ether as brain events or as ideas. Since in Spinoza’s view bodily and mental events are one and the same thing, there is no question of the one causing the other. In the *Concept of Mind* Gilbert Ryle launched an attack on the Cartesian view of the mind as an immaterial entity which acts upon a non-mental body, the ‘ghost in the machine’ view. Ryle’s attack is well-founded: we aren’t ‘bodies plus minds’ but unified beings with both mental and bodily aspects that is persons, agents, human beings. This can also be interpreted also as Spinoza’s concept of man, which may not, however, be immediately apparent.

According to Leibniz the universe consists of an infinite number of substances called monads. To think of human being as monads not only preserves the teleological character of humanity but also articulates the human characteristic of identity within diversity. The human self is an identity in the sense that it remains the same throughout time and diversity in terms of changes in experiences, thought etc. The principle of continuity, which Leibniz introduced, enabled him to formulate a doctrine of degrees of consciousness. Consciousness is not just a peculiarity of human minds. Consciousness is a continuum and every monad is a focus of sentient experience (a feeling, a life) at some particular level in this continuum. Even though there are monads at many different levels of consciousness, yet, every monad is a real individual just because at whatever level of consciousness it operates, its experience is
its own. The hierarchy of monads is differentiated by the degree of consciousness. This is to say Leibniz considers the individual as the basic metaphysical truth of the universe. In this way, he seems to emphasize the general modern focus on the individual self.

Body and soul seem to act on each other. The former moves when the latter wills it, the latter perceives and conceives when the former receives a physical impression, and this is due to pre-established harmony, owing to which the monads constituting the body and the ruling monad necessarily agree, just as two perfectly regulated clocks show the same time. Thought and extension are not substances which repel and exclude each other, but different attributes of one and the same substance.

Leibniz attempted to solve the problem of the reciprocal action of the body and soul in the simplest and easiest manner. Thought and extension are not substances which repel and exclude each other, but different attributes of one and the same substance. Hence nothing seems more natural than to assume a direct connection between intellectual phenomena and the facts about the physiological world. However, that is not the case. The metaphysics of Leibniz finds itself as powerless as Cartesianism. To say that the body and the soul agree in their respective states by virtue of pre-established harmony is to say that a thing is because it is. The connection just mentioned would have been perfectly apparent if the human individual was a single monad, having as its immaterial essence the soul, and as its sensible manifestation, the body. If by body we meant the material element inhering in the central monad (for it must be remembered that each monad, and consequently also the central monad or the highest soul, is both soul and body), nothing would be more proper than to speak of a mutual action between the soul and body. But the physical individual is not an isolated monad, but a central monad surrounded by other monads, and it is the latter, or this group of subordinate souls, which strictly speaking, constitute the body of the individual. Since the monads have no windows, within one and the same monad, the ruling monad, for example, there may and must be a causal relation between its successive states but such a relation is impossible between two different monads. Each monad is ‘windowless’, hence a real and direct action of the dominant monad upon the subordinate monad, or of soul upon body, is an
impossibility in Leibniz’s system. He too faces the same interaction problem like that of Descartes. But Leibniz, on the contrary, thought he had diagnosed a significant error in the Cartesian philosophical system and thereby provided a solution to Descartes’ problem in his account of consciousness.

Leibniz’s account treats consciousness as a natural phenomenon to be explained in natural ways. He attempted to bridge the gap between Descartes’ unbridgeable notion of mind and body by arguing that there can be immaterial bodies and material consciousness. Leibniz’s concept of consciousness and body in this light can be said to be the answer to the philosophical problem of mind-body dualism. But in order to have achieved this he would have been able to demonstrate how this theory will allow for the transition from conscious to non-conscious states. If he could have done that (and he thinks he had done that) than his theory of mind could have avoided many of the problems plaguing the Cartesian theory of mind. He himself was sure that he opened the door to a new theory, one that will open up a new science of mind. Even though Leibniz’s attempt could not lead to any logical conclusion, yet, his endeavor is praise worthy. Despite all the shortcomings in his theory of mind his very attempt to bridge the gap between material and the non-material entities should be treated as a step forward.

Berkeley was a strict idealist who tried to demonstrate that the only things we experience are perceptions, thoughts and feelings within our own mind. There is no need to ever assume that anything material exists. The universal is inconceivable apart from the mind. Matter and external things, in so far as they are thought to have an existence beyond the circle of consciousness, are impossible, inconceivable. The external world of physics is only a figment of imagination. There must be some cause of the thoughts and sensations that occur in our minds. According to him this cause is the one undivided active spirit which produces these effects on our consciousness.

In Berkeley, the relation of things to consciousness is alone dealt with, and beyond this relationship things do not exist in his view. Thus, while Locke’s ultimate point is abstract substance; Berkeley declares this substance to be the most incomprehensible assumption of all. It is Berkeley’s metaphysical views that shaped
his conception of the self. It is soul or the spiritual substance that is denoted by the term self. He is fairly hostile to the concept of the body as an ontologically independent reality as for him it is the mind and only the mind that exists. To a degree the Berkeleian spirit can be counted as a genuine substance and it may seem related to the Cartesian mind, which is bound up with consciousness. The view that Berkelian spirit is something like a Cartesian mind is tempting. Even though Berkeley indicates the use of Lockean notion of ‘person’ in his notebook yet he rejects the central piece of Locke’s theory, namely the determination of identity over time through consciousness of past actions. His theory of the self can be said to have the worst flaws of both Descartes and Locke taken together. This is the reason because of which his philosophical conclusions have never gained ascendancy within Western culture. Berkeley was, in fact, only a partial empiricist and had failed to develop the empirical principles to their logical conclusions. His claim that spirits cannot be objects of scientific investigation takes away even the residual authenticity of his claims regarding the idea of the self.

Hume represents a type of pure empiricism where certainty is only assigned to experience. As we can only directly know the mind he works within this constraint. The most important step in Hume’s philosophy was his endeavor to discover what is given to our consciousness through our senses. We have no way of bridging the gap between the contents of our consciousness and an external, nonconscious physical world. Although such a world may exist, we can have no knowledge of its existence.

Hume famously questioned the existence of the self and since than the number, variety and intensity of attacks has increased. The self he argued is not experienced. What we experience are successive, changing impressions all of which are supposed to refer to the self. His conclusion was that the self is nothing but a bundle of perceptions. It is by error that we arrive at the sense of self. Like Locke he insists that it is a fabrication achieved through association, imagination and memory. For Hume one is perpetually conscious of one’s past existence through memory which itself helps institute connections by which the idea of oneself arises. Consciousness of one’s present existence, however, is totally left for dead.
What started with absolutely certain knowledge of self’s existence as in the case of Descartes had to eventually face a challenge of Hume’s ultimate skeptical position. The central tenet of the substantive idea of the self of modern Western Philosophy had been completely eroded by Hume. So strong, it seems, was his commitment to securing a scientifically perceivable mind, at any rate, that in order to address Berkeleian spirit he dared titter and sway at the precipice of the most of outrageous skepticism.

Hume’s position is vulnerable. It seems to rule out the very ‘I’. If Hume really believed what his arguments led him to believe, the ‘I’ to whom he attributed his belief would be a fiction or referring to some fiction. Something had clearly gone wrong with Hume’s conception of self. Hume’s error was to look for the wrong kind of entity. Of course, the self cannot be observed through introspection. It is not a kind of percept or super-percept. It is presupposed in perception and later on Kant pointed out these aspects.

But Hume’s sentiments seem to echo contemporary conception of the self. In the last century, thinkers approaching the world in very different ways have arrived at similar conclusions. Existentialists, notably Sartre, have emphasized how the self is not a thing. Dennett’s ideas also seem to have been derived from Hume up to a certain extent. Postmodernists have argued that the self is merely a node in a network of symbols and signs. The popularization of neuroscience has done most to disseminate the idea that the self is an illusion. Nowhere is there a place in the brain where the neurons or neural activities are organized into anything like a self.

Thus, Hume’s philosophy has two extremely significant elements. On the one hand, Hume’s viewpoint and consequences of his philosophy are an inevitable radicalization of the philosophy of consciousness. It is indeed the dead-end street. On the other hand, by destroying many traditional dogmas, Hume opened up a new possible way of doing philosophy, i.e., the transcendental philosophy.

Kant’s concept of the self came about in part as a response to Hume. Hume’s self is a passive observer similar to watching one’s life pass before as a play as on screen. The self is nothing but simply memory and imagination. Kant however has a
rationalistic motive and posits that the mind actively manipulates data through acts of synthesis. Kant argued that the content of experience is necessarily subject to the pure concepts of the understanding in general. The subject is a part of what makes experience possible for us. He used inner sense to defend the heterogeneity of body and the soul – bodies are objects of outer sense and souls are objects of inner sense. In Kant’s thought there are two components of the self: the inner-self and the outer self. Neither apperception of the self nor empirical consciousness of self as the object of particular representations yield knowledge of oneself as one is but as one appears to oneself. When we are conscious of ourselves as subject and agent by doing acts of apperception, we do appear to ourselves to be substantial, simple and continuing. The self is the subject of all experiences.

He can be credited for eradicating the last traces of the medieval world views from modern philosophy. He held that it is mind’s receptive, synthetic and conceptualizing capacities that make experience possible for us. Even though his claims about the mind are critical to his system of philosophy, yet, he never attempted to develop a systematic philosophy of mind. He himself held that his view of mind and consciousness were inessential to his main purpose. He rejected the Cartesian claims that we have a privileged self-knowledge. His contribution to the understanding of mind came largely as a by-product of his main project i.e. to determine what we can know. Even though his ideas about the mind came as an off-shoot of his other quests, yet, they came to have an enormous influence on his successors.

To Kant, the mind is not Locke’s blank paper waiting to be filled by experience. The mind comes furnished with a set of pure apriori concepts, categories, the function of which is to organize incoming sensory information. It must be able to synthesize and must have a distinctive unity. It actively interprets the incoming informations and imposes meaning on the materials of experiences. This means that the meanings derived from experiences is determined by the structure of the mind. His theory of the active cognizer stands behind his famous philosophical doctrine i.e. the thesis that the order and regularity in what we call nature is brought by ourselves. We would not be able to find it there in case the nature of our mind had not originally put it there.
But surprisingly his ideas on mind which came as an off-shoot of his other quests came to have an enormous influence on his successors. In general, Kant’s model of mind that flowed from his work was the dominant model in empirical psychology. The power of the mind to influence perception is now well accepted and illustrated in a variety of illusions. He can be said to have revolutionized philosophy. He showed that the mind through its innate categories constructs our experience along certain lines (space, time, causality, self, etc.). Thinking and experiencing can give no access to things as they really are. We can think as hard as we like, but we will never be able to escape the innate constraints of our minds. He forced philosophy to look seriously at the agent independently of the real world outside consciousness.

5.4 CONTEMPORARY TIMES

After Kant the most striking contribution to the study of mind-body can be traced to the contemporary times. Although the terminology that is used to address the mind-body problem today has drastically changed, yet, the subject and the focus remains the same. The new age has witnessed a confident use of the new age scientific inventions and discoveries amongst philosophers of mind to find an answer to the mind-body problem. The major problem of this era in the field of Philosophy of mind remains the problem of consciousness. The question regarding the body and the self can be said to have been placed in the periphery. Biological evolution has revealed that consciousness is locked in the brain, rooted in its tissues. But this has led further to the question of the nature of this deep and intimate link. How can physical give rise to something non-physical? This question is the root of the perennial conceptual problem regarding the traditional divide between subjective and objective. This divide stands as a major obstacle in the acceptance of the fact that consciousness can arise from the brain processes. Central questions current in contemporary Philosophy of mind are: Why does consciousness exist? What does it do? How could it possibly arise from a lump of grey matter? We know consciousness far more intimately than we know the rest of the world, but we understand the rest of the world far better than we understand consciousness. Consciousness can be startlingly intense. It is the most vivid phenomena; nothing is more real to us. But it can be frustrating in the sense that it is notoriously difficult to pin down the subject matter of it. Modern science tells us
that the mind is just the brain working. But science cannot tell us how consciousness or the sense of self arises out of the merely material processes of the brain. Could our confidence that the mind is just the brain working be misplaced? How does brain bind together various sensory inputs to produce a unified subjective experience? What are neural correlates of consciousness? Could an appropriately constructed machine be conscious? Analysis of these questions holds the centre stage in the domain of Philosophy of mind. In the contemporary terms questions about mind can be mostly enumerated in terms: How could a conscious mental state have any impact on a physical object such as the human body? Can the mind be fully explained by the brain? What kind of thing is a brain, that it makes consciousness possible? What is the nature of the bond that connects our conscious experience with the workings of the grey matter in our heads? Contemporary philosophers of mind are indulging themselves in finding answers to them by an understanding of the concepts of consciousness as it is what interests them the most.

One of the most influential philosophical voices in the philosophy of mind of the contemporary times is that of Daniel C. Dennett. His opinion regarding the mystery of consciousness is that only a theory that explained conscious events in terms of unconscious events could explain consciousness at all. Any theory of consciousness has got to explain how consciousness can arise from a number of components, which themselves are not conscious. That is the key. In *Consciousness Explained* he discusses about how consciousness may be explained mechanistically. In his attempt to demystify consciousness he gives an account of how consciousness arises from interaction of physical and cognitive processes in the brain. Also he puts a final nail to the coffin of the general notion of ‘self’ when he call it a fictional entity. According to him there exists no such self which is the central head of all our conscious experiences as there is, “no single definitive ‘stream of consciousness’, because there is no central headquarters, no ‘Cartesian theatre’ where it all comes together. Instead of a such a single stream(whatever wide),there are multiple channels in which specialist circuits try, in parallel pandemonium, to do their various things, creating Multiple Drafts as they go.”

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He presents a powerful critique of the mainstream view of the nature of consciousness, which he names as ‘The Cartesian Theatre View’ and thereby tried to develop a new theory of consciousness called ‘The Multiple Drafts Model’. He attempts a third-person, analytic approach to the investigation of the mind-body problem, as opposed to the traditional first-person, inductive approach found in Descartes and Searle. He suggests an alternative way to see the mind, a way to join the subjective experience of consciousness with the meat and neurons in the brain. He tries to show that the old ways of thinking are not necessarily the only way to think about the mind. His primary concern is with providing a Philosophy of mind that is governed by empirical research. According to him consciousness is a function of the physical brain and not a mysterious property of the ‘lump of wonder-stuff’ that so often gets termed as a ‘soul’ or ‘self’. He believes that with the onslaught of empirical and conceptual advances in the cognitive science the mysteries surrounding consciousness are beginning to dissolve.

Dennett’s MDM has been highly influential but has also drawn criticism, especially from those who find it insufficiently realist in its view of consciousness and at best incomplete in achieving its stated goal to fully explain it. Critics of Dennett’s approach, such as David Chalmers and Thomas Nagel, argue that Dennett’s argument misses the point of inquiry by merely re-defining consciousness as an external property and ignoring the subjective aspect completely.

Another influential contributor to the study of mind in the contemporary times is John Searle. He believed that in order to find a solution to the age old mind-body problem or more specifically the problem about the conscious phenomenon we must start afresh. Consciousness according to him is a biological problem. It is the brain that causes consciousness. The most important question facing us in biological sciences today is ‘How exactly do neurobiological processes in the brain cause consciousness?’ Philosophical problem about consciousness arises because we are not ready to accept realities such as the one that publicly observable phenomena – the brain processes – produce the private, subjective characteristic of all consciousness. This is known in Philosophy of mind as the hard problem but Searle prefers to call it the fundamental problem. He is of the opinion that breakthrough to explaining
consciousness will come from some simple system when we learn to accept some fundamental truths. He has been arguing in a number of writings that the philosophical part (though not the neurobiological part) of the traditional mind-body problem has a fairly simple and obvious solution. All of our mental phenomena are caused by lower level neuronal processes in the brain and are themselves realized in the brain as higher level, or system features. There is nothing mysterious regarding the conscious phenomenon and that consciousness arises by genetic evolution.

Searle’s analysis of the mind-body problem is brilliant. He argues that all forms of consciousness – from feeling thirsty to being in love are caused by the behavior of neurons and are realized in the brain system, which is itself composed of neurons. But this does not mean that consciousness is nothing but neuronal behavior. The main point of having the concept of consciousness, Searle points out, is to capture the first person subjective features of phenomenon and this point is lost if we redefine consciousness in the third person objective terms. There is no reason why a physical system such as a human or animal organism should not have states that are qualitative, subjective, and intentional i.e. focused on something. There are not two metaphysical realms in the skull – one physical and the other mental. Rather, there are just processes going on in the brain and some of them are conscious experiences. Revision of the traditional Cartesian definition of both ‘mental’ and ‘physical’ will help us see everything in a new light according to Searle. One question that arises when we concede to the claim that there is a causal relation between brain and consciousness is whether that leads us to commit to a dualism of ‘physical’ things and the ‘mental’ things? The answer according to him is a definite no. Problem arises because there is so much confusion surrounding the notions of objectivity and subjectivity. Brain processes cause consciousness but the consciousness they cause is not some extra substance or entity. It is just a higher level feature of the whole system. The two crucial relationships between consciousness and the brain, then, can be summarized as follows: lower level neuronal processes in the brain cause consciousness and consciousness is simply a higher level feature of the system that is made up of the lower level neuronal elements.
Searle also throws light on the ‘self’ as a problem in philosophy and neurobiology. According to him there is a formal or logical requirement that we postulate self as something in addition to the experiences in order that we can make a sense of the character of our experiences. The self, for Searle, turns out to be pretty much the same as our everyday banal conception, a sense that there is a continuing ‘I’ behind our consciousness. The sense of self is a thus a product of a certain sort of consciousness, not conversely. But at the same time he admits that his assumption of the existence of the self does not solve the problem of the concept of self as we are still in dark about its nature.

Searle holds the body to be the originator of consciousness through the process of evolution. There cannot be disembodied consciousness. Consciousness is nothing but a higher level function of the body or more specifically the brain. It is the unity of consciousness that gives us the feeling of self. The sense of self is a product of a certain sense of consciousness and not vice versa. Searle’s view of ‘Self, Consciousness and the Body’ is that all the three are intricately entwined to our understanding of ourselves. The body (the brain) gives rise to consciousness and consciousness brings about a sense of self. Searle’s thoughts are engaging though at times it seems vague leaving too many gaps for the readers to fill in.

Next we have McGinn who believes that the mind is indeed a product of the material qualities of the brain but at the same time he argues that the mind (or brain) does not itself possess the ability to solve the ‘mind-body problem’. He defends the radical view that human beings in principle cannot solve the mystery of consciousness. In his opinion, consciousness has a hidden structure, one which will always be in principle unknowable to human beings. Because consciousness has a structure that is cognitively sealed from human beings, we are incapable of understanding the riddle of the conscious mind. Since the bond between the mind and brain is a deep mystery, creatures with our powers of understanding do not and cannot understand why particular types of brain processes are necessarily connected with particular types of conscious experience. It is an ultimate mystery that the human intelligence will never be able to unravel. He argues that the mystery of the mind-body is merely a reflection of our ignorance. The mind-body connection is not an
actual mystery bur appears to be so due to our limited faculties. Many philosophers and scientist have undertaken this journey before him, but McGinn contends that this long road of philosophical inquiry is actually a blind alley. He thinks that there is a perfectly natural cause for consciousness but that we are cut off from knowing what it is. He holds that with regard to the problem of consciousness it is cognitively closed to us. Once we realize why consciousness seems mysterious, the philosophical problem of consciousness will disappear and we will realize that there is nothing miraculous or mystical about it. Although he is pessimistic about a scientific or constructive solution to the mind-body problem, he is optimistic about solving the philosophical problem of consciousness. He concedes that we do not need to solve the scientific puzzle in order to remove the philosophical one.

Amongst the contemporary philosophers, McGinn is one who makes an attempt to evaluate the concept of the ‘self’ besides his array into the domain of consciousness to solve the eternal problem of the mind-body. He deeply delves into understanding the concept of ‘self’ and in the process displays the connection between self, consciousness and the body. This connect is displayed when he employs the personal identity test to understand what the self is all about. He seems to endorse the ordinary concept of the self with the following properties: It is a simple indivisible substance; it is not ontologically reducible; it is either present or absent and cannot be an in-between case; its survival is not a matter of degree; the mental concepts are revealed in the first person perspective of ‘I’ and so on. These properties are connected in various ways. But the most fundamental concept of self is that it is a simple substance apprehended as such in self-consciousness. This explains according to McGinn why the self is irreducible and why we cannot give informative criteria of identity for it, and also why there really cannot be a partial survival of a self.

McGinn’s exposition of the mind-body problem is an intelligent and readable summary of the centuries of philosophical debate regarding it. He gives an account of what consciousness is and then goes on to explain the concept of the self. Consciousness and self are intrinsically entwined according to him. There cannot be an existence of the self without it being conscious. In fact unity of consciousness is the primary condition of being a self. Due to cognitive closure we are not able to
know exactly what consciousness is all about i.e. the predictions of shape, size, dimensionality of it and so. He thoroughly examines the reasons for this closure in order to uncover the deep reasons for our bafflement. Toward the end all we can do is to ask McGinn as to how can we know that we cannot know something? If human intelligence is cognitively closed to understanding consciousness than how can human intelligence ever deduce this? Again just accepting his proposition of cognitive closure does not necessarily lead us to a well reasoned conclusion. But it seems McGinn on the contrary thinks that by pointing us the cognitive closure he is actually doing us a favor. We need no longer waste our time trying to solve the mind-body problem. And we need not superstitiously invoke miracles to address it.

David Chalmers like most of his contemporaries admits that consciousness poses the most baffling problem in the science of mind. He offers a convincing analysis of the mind-body debate and lays out a major new theory of consciousness, one that rejects the prevailing reductionist’s trend of science but is still compatible with scientific view of the world. One of the main focuses of his analysis is the distinction between brain biology and mental experiences known as qualia. He argues for the irreducibility of the experience of awareness to purely physical processes and does not concede to the reductive explanations prevalent. He believes that materialist explanations cannot account for the existence of consciousness and convincingly establishes that contemporary cognitive science and neuroscience has not been able to explain how subjective experience emerges from neural processes in the brain. He proposes that consciousness has both physical and non-physical properties and advances his own dualistic theory of consciousness making him one of the few remaining dualists left in the philosophy world. He advocates a distinction between easy problems of consciousness, which are things like finding the neural correlates of sensation or more precisely the objective aspects of consciousness, and the hard problem, which could be phrased in Nagel’s terminology ‘what it is like to be’ or the subjective aspects of consciousness. He holds that there is an ‘explanatory gap’ from the objective to the subjective. Consciousness according to him is a fundamental property ontologically autonomous of any known (or even possible) physical properties, and he suggests that a set of ‘psychophysical’ laws are needed to explain
why and how of consciousness and determine which physical systems are associated with which types of qualia. He proposes that conscious experience must instead be understood in a new light – as an irreducible entity (like such physical properties as mass, time and space) that exist at a fundamental level and cannot be understood as the sum of simpler physical parts. He sets out on a quest for a fundamental theory – a theory of the basic laws governing the structure and character of conscious experience – and shows how this reconception of the mind could lead us to a new science of consciousness.

In order to explain the conscious phenomenon Chalmers presents his own theory of consciousness which he calls ‘naturalistic dualism’ (but might as well have called ‘naturalistic monism’). It is a variant of what is known as ‘property dualism’: there are no two substances (mental and physical), there is only one substance, but that substance has two separate sets of properties, one physical and mental. Conscious experience is due to mental properties. The physical sciences have studied only the physical properties. The physical sciences study macroscopic properties like ‘temperature’ that is due to microscopic properties such as the physical properties of particles. Consciousness is over and above the physical laws and hence we require a new set of ‘psychophysical laws’ that deal with its ‘protophenomenal properties’. Consciousness supervenes naturally on the physical: the ‘psychophysical laws’ will explain this supervenience; they will explain how conscious experience depends on physical processes. Chalmers emphasizes that this applies only to consciousness.

There is certain positivity about Chalmers’ attitude as unlike some of his contemporaries he does not conclude that consciousness cannot be explained. He says that it cannot be explained the way the physical sciences explain everything else i.e. by reducing the system to ever smaller parts. He leaves the door open for a ‘nonreductive’ explanation of consciousness.

5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS
The analysis of the History of Western Philosophy stands as a witness to the fact that the mind-body problem is one of the deepest puzzles of Philosophy. It is the problem of giving an account of self and how the mind or mental processes are related to
bodily states. Ever since it’s beginning in antiquity the problem has intrigued philosophers and theologians. Even today philosophers of mind, cognitive scientists, neuroscientist and psychologists are all concerned with this problem.

The study of the various philosophical notions on ‘self, consciousness and the body’ has thrown light to a very important aspect. It is that there has been no unanimous agreement on the concept of self, consciousness and the body. Unanimous agreement is in fact a distant dream. There is not even a clear idea on such a basic question as to what constitutes the self – is it a bodily entity or just a conscious phenomenon or both. There is a diversity of opinions. Even though Philosophy of mind along with other disciplines has been putting much effort to solve the problem of mind-body, yet, it has not reached its desired end. The answer would, to a large extent, depend on what we mean by progress in philosophical terms. But the good thing is that the debate on consciousness is ongoing and the slowness of its progress has in no ways hampered its philosophical speculations. And as long as there are positive speculations we must not lose hope as intellectual engagements will definitely bear fruits.