6.1 THE PROBLEM OF SELF, CONSCIOUSNESS AND BODY

Philosophical reflections on the human ‘self’ – body/brain and soul/mind/consciousness, as has been said earlier, can be traced back to the dawn of philosophical speculations. The polarities between which it fluctuates were set out by Plato and Aristotle. Modern debate on the self – whether it is a material or an immaterial substance or a combination of the two – commences with the heir to the Platonic tradition, namely the Cartesian conception of human beings as two one-sided things, a mind and a body. Cartesian dualism has argued for a view of the self as the subject of experience according to which facts about the body are not logically sufficient grounds for inference concerning the self. However, in our normal everyday life we usually take facts about the body as evidence concerning a person (i.e. a self) and even practically as conclusive evidence mostly applicable in the cases of other persons. Thus, contrary to the commonsense notion of the self as an embodied conscious being, for Descartes and his supporters a person or self is to be defined only in terms of it being a soul i.e. as a non-material, unextended substance in which the mental processes or states of consciousness inhere. Descartes’ concept of ‘thought’ can be identified with that of modern day concept of consciousness. With Descartes the idea of the soul or mind was narrowed to a bare point of consciousness. Following Descartes the latter philosophers Locke, Berkeley and Hume also held that the immediately objects of awareness of mind are its ideas. This definition is ostensive because in it instead of physically pointing to the object, we mentally fix our attention on the inner process and make a connection between it (the process) and the world. It is private, because it takes place in each one’s mind, such that no one else can be aware of what is taking place in my mind. In their view the identity of the self is dependent on our private inner consciousness of us. Our knowledge of the other minds according to them must be based on analysis. Thus, since Rene Descartes introduced the famous Cartesian dualism i.e. separation of mind and matter into two distinct but interacting substances, much discussion has followed. The central problem that emerged from Cartesianism and its inheritors is how to explain the connection between the private conscious experiences and the body.
Descartes’ way of distinguishing mind and body has certain appeal in it. Otherwise, his theory would not have been taken so seriously. Conscious experiences of the mind, and things mental, do not exist in space or have parts with spatial dimensions. Bodily things have no absolute identity as they keep on changing from time to time. Minds and bodies are bearers of completely incompatible properties, and thus refer to separate metaphysical substances. The famous problem that followed Descartes’ theory is that there seems to be no way to explain the substantial unity or the interaction of the mind and body. Philosophers over the ages have either agreed or disagreed to Descartes’ claim but have never ignored it. The chief drawback of dualism is its failure to account adequately for mental causation. If the mind is nonphysical, it has no position in physical space. How, then, can a mental cause give rise to space? To put it another way, how can the nonphysical give rise to the physical? There is definitely a problem. Few would deny Descartes’ dualistic arguments are powerful and worthy of consideration even today. Nor can it be denied that it was Descartes’ dualism that had set the agenda for Philosophy of mind that was to follow him.

The contemporary philosophers, on the face, blamed Descartes as the cause of most of the troubles in the domain of Philosophy of mind. Despite criticizing Descartes, in reality, they have retained the basic structure of Cartesianism in disguise. Substance-dualism was abandoned by the new generation, but they did not discard structural dualism. Contemporary philosophers, thus, continues to work in the long, dark shadow of Descartes. They now ascribe much the same array of mental predicates to the brain as Descartes ascribed to the mind, and conceive of the relationship between thought and action, and experience and its objects, in much the same way as him – merely replacing the mind by the brain. What has been done by the contemporary philosophers of mind is that they have merely replaced the Cartesian dualism of mind and body with the analogous dualism of brain and the conscious experiences i.e. the brain has replaced the body and consciousness has replaced the mind. In spite of their adamant repudiation of Cartesianism they are still entangled in the age old problem of reconciling the brain process with that of conscious experiences. Of course, the contemporary philosophers of mind do not talk
assertively as Descartes in terms of two distinct kinds of Cartesian substances, a material body and an immaterial mind. Consciousness today is more or less accepted as having biological origins. So, the blunt division of physical and non-physical as in Descartes has now become obscure but the division still remains. Both the brain and consciousness appears to be material and there appears at first blush, to be no duality whatsoever. However, appearances are deceptive. Contemporary Philosophy of mind still retains the fundamental logical structure of dualism under cover. The problem in reality remains as it is but has acquired a new terminology. Today, we do not talk about the division of consciousness and the brain straight forwardly in terms of physical and non-physical. We have discovered a new way of retaining the problem in disguise by shifting all the worries associated with the subjective aspects of the mind to the domain of qualia or ‘what is it like to be.’ aspect of consciousness. We fail to understand how the grey lump of matter i.e. the brain can give rise to qualia or subjective first-person experiences of consciousness. Even though significant discoveries concerning the workings of the brain have been made, yet, these discoveries have been obscured due to the problem in accepting and adopting these basic truths. This is because we still are in the grip of the dominating age old incoherent conceptual framework of the division of reality into two distinct hemispheres: physical and the mental that we find it difficult to accept the simple fact that consciousness is a biological phenomenon and the subjective part of consciousness is nothing mysterious. We are still engrossed in finding an answer to the question: how can conscious experiences which are non-physical in nature arise from the physical biological being? One of the most important causes of taking the self to be an elusive phenomenon is the problem of accepting this basic truth about the evolution of subjective i.e. conscious experiences from the objective i.e. body or brain. So, we need to know both the body and consciousness in order to know the self.

In order to uncover the self we need to uncover the conscious phenomenon. As soon as we start asking about consciousness we land up asking about its relation to the body because empirical evidences tell us that consciousness is always embodied. Disembodied consciousness is not supported by empirical evidences. But even though consciousness and body are integral to each other as supported by empirical evidence,
yet, we hesitate to accept it a truth. This is because the ontology of consciousness is non-physical whereas that of body is physical. The difficulty to reconcile the union of the non-physical and the physical is the reason that has given rise to the very famous mind-body problem that treats the inner and outer lives as two separate items between which business must somehow be transacted. The important question before us is that do we need to continue thinking in that way?

In order to answer this, let us try to analyse the question since its inception. On probing it appears that the reason because of which we have not been able to reach an answer is because of the faulty way in which we have started asking the question itself. Since the pre-Socratic days thinkers have formed the habit of asking – ‘What basic stuff the whole world is made of? The question expects that we choose out of many distinct available options. The dualist reply was that there was not just one stuff but two – mind and the body. Following Descartes’ dualism many other thinkers with more or less different versions of dualism joined his camp. Descartes’ conception is a seventeenth century way of seeing the problem. It is tied to views in Physics and many other topics that we no longer hold. With the discoveries made in the field of Physical sciences regarding matter especially in the domain of brain science; officially speaking the philosophers of the recent era are supposed to have got rid of the dualistic mind-body problem generated by Descartes. Half a century back almost all Western thinkers were in agreement that the talk in terms of ‘ghost in a machine’ should be stopped. Philosophers who did not accept dualism were of the opinion that mind and matter were one. In other words Materialistic Monism, the most plausible form of which is Logical or Methodological Behaviorism, had taken over dualism. We will not go in to details of Behaviorism but the important thing to note is that this particular age paved the way for us to triumphantly declare that finally we have an answer to the Pre-Socratic question by finding a single solution to it whereby we could declare that everything was actually matter. We could keep the material machine and get rid of the mental ghost. Materialist did exactly this. They tabooed all notions of inner life leading to the effect that people who wanted to seem scientific were forbidden to mention consciousness or subjectivity at all. This attitude is a perfect example of how philosophers across the ages have either overemphasized
dualism or materialism in their attempt to pin-point that basic stuff that we are made out of. They have always taken sides of the physical or the non-physical. There has always been an unofficial attempt to derecognize the simple self-evident truth that a human being is a combination of mind and matter rather than being only mind or matter. We can never claim to have discovered the self unless we give an account of the subjective non-physical experiences along with the bodily physical aspects. Both the aspects are integral part of the self and a good theory of the self can ignore none.

Going back to the story of the mind-body problem in Philosophy let us take a look at what happened after discarding dualism. After dualism, materialism was almost a trend for some time. But it did not work well for a very long time. A world without conscious existence did not seem plausible. A world of machines without users or designers – a world of objects without subjects – could not be made convincing. Gradually it became clear that the machine which has been designed for a user or a subject could not function without it. Attempts to use it own its own did not work well and seemed unreal and artificial. So, philosophers started rethinking on the issue of materialism. Some twenty years back consciousness or subjectivity was suddenly rediscovered and the learned population unanimously agreed that it constitutes a crucial problem at the same time acknowledging the fact that the concepts that we now have for dealing with it are still the ones that were devised to make it unspeakable in the first place.

Nagel, Dennett, Colin McGinn, Searle, Chalmers and many others have started readdressing this problem with considerable force in the recent times. Most of them agree that there is deep mystery element involved with the conscious phenomena. McGinn in his book *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* writes: “The problem is how any collection of cells…… could generate conscious beings. The problem is in the raw materials. It looks as if, with consciousness, a new kind of reality has been injected into the universe….. How can mere matter generate consciousness? ….. If the brain is spatial, being a chunk of matter in space, how on the earth could the mind arise from the brain? ….. This seems to be like a miracle, a
rupture in the natural order.”¹ Many recent philosophers echo the concern of McGinn. They all wonder what could make the brain uniquely the organ of consciousness. David Chalmers go on to proclaim extravagantly that our ignorance about consciousness may be “the largest outstanding obstacle to a scientific understanding of the universe.”² Daniel Dennett suggests that “while science has revealed the secrets of magnetism, photosynthesis, digestion and reproduction, it has so far failed to penetrate the nature of consciousness for the following reasons: Particular cases of magnetism or photosynthesis or digestion are in principle equally accessible to any observer with the right apparatus, but any particular case of consciousness seems to have a favored or privileged observer, whose access to the phenomenon is entirely unlike, and better than anyone else’s, no matter what apparatus they have. Every conscious state is always someone’s conscious state. Just as I have a special relation to my conscious states, which is not like to my relation to other people’s conscious states, so, they in turn have a special relation to their conscious states, which is not like my relation to their states. For this reason and others, not only have we so far no good theory of consciousness, we lack even a clear uncontroversial pre-theoretical description of the presumed phenomenon.”³ Searle too agreed that the brain’s “conscious aspects are accessible to me in a way that they are not accessible to you. And your present state of consciousness is a feature of your brain and its conscious aspects are accessible to you in a way that they are not accessible to me.”⁴ Scientists as well as philosophers agree that at the moment we are almost completely in dark about the nature of consciousness. This is a widely shared conception where the alleged ignorance regarding consciousness is rooted in the thought that each person has a privileged access to his own consciousness but not to the conscious experiences of others. Consciousness thus is commonly regarded as something which is not publicly observable, but as a privately observable phenomenon. So it is believed that because of the methodological difficulty to study consciousness we have not been able to know much about it and are almost in a state of ignorance regarding it. Not only there is confession regarding ignorance about consciousness due to its private

³ Daniel Dennett, Conscious Explained, op. cit., p.315.
accessibility but also a few like McGinn unhesitatingly claim it to be a mysterious entity. Dennett too seems to agree upon this when he holds that consciousness is “the most mysterious feature of our mind,”\(^5\) and Chalmers asserts that “conscious experience is at once the most familiar thing in the world and the most mysterious.”\(^6\) Despite calling it a mystery at the moment due to lack of pathfinding discoveries regarding it, Dennett, Searle and Chalmers are not pessimistic about it. They have good faith that the right kind of study will definitely lead to some ground-breaking discoveries regarding it. But the good thing is that the contemporary philosophers of mind have rediscovered consciousness and generally agree that we need to delve on it. Ignoring it and saying that it does not exist will take us nowhere.

But at the same time it is actually surprising to find such outright admittance by the likes of McGinn about the ignorance and mysteries regarding consciousness – insisting that there are limits to our power of understanding. Admitting ignorance regarding consciousness means that we will not be able to locate its relationship with the body and hence our path to know the self is overshadowed by darkness. But do we need to fall back on this rather desperate solution. Is there actually a methodological error which holds us back from understanding consciousness or that there is something wrong with the way we perceive the problem at large? It could be that our traditional way of viewing the problem is leading us to state the problem in a wrong manner. Do we have to wait desperately for some amazing discoveries regarding consciousness to know the self? But what seems plausible to me at the moment is to locate the exact nature of the problem and try to analyze it from a different perspective altogether by placing things rightly and simply as suggested by Wittgenstein. In order to do this we need to delve deep into the matter and see how and where things have gone wrong in the analysis of consciousness.

### 6.2 TRACING THE ROOT OF THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

This study is a survey of the historical and conceptual roots of problems of understanding the concept of the self and its relation to consciousness and the body.

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The survey has shown that there has been evolving a systematic thought process on these issues from the time of the early Greeks philosophers. In the contemporary times these questions are of no less value and are pursued with equal vigor. Even though the study of the self is as old as human history, yet, if we analyze the nature of questions asked on the seemingly elusive phenomenon we will discover that not much has changed in the pattern of the questions asked. One striking feature about the nature of the questions regarding the self is that they are entangled with a lot of other philosophical issues. It is not an uncommon trait in Philosophy. The very nature of philosophical questions is such that it is difficult in Philosophy to say anything without saying everything. Philosophical issues and arguments are so deep and complex that when one begins to examine any one of them, one will soon find that it is near impossible to come to a settled conclusion without also examining many others. So like other typical philosophical concepts even the concept of the self is embedded in a web of relationships to other concepts and phenomena. To inquire into the nature of the self and its relationship to the body and consciousness is to set out on a course of study that leads almost immediately to general questions in metaphysics and epistemology. Keeping this in mind, in this study I have tried to analyze the role of consciousness and the body in understanding the concept of the self by delineating the related inquiries to the topic of our discussion. The views of eminent philosophers from the time of the Greek Philosophy to the contemporary times have been incorporated in the study.

The main area of enquiry is the analysis of philosophical problems in accepting the commonsensical notion that a ‘person’ or a ‘self’ is an embodied conscious being and is capable of certain types of complex psychological attributes. But the answer to this question is not as easy as it seems to be. Over the course of its history to the modern times the self has turned out to become an even more elusive phenomenon, while its role as a bearer of individual responsibility has become even more pronounced. What is it that is holding us back from the desired goal i.e. to know the self, despite repeated attempts by philosophers across ages to unravel the mysteries surrounding it and its relation to consciousness and the body? What is it about our own self that is so very difficult to understand that we are still stuck with
this rather primitive question – whether the self is a body or mind (consciousness) – that has been plaguing the human mind since their inception in this world? This question becomes even more important keeping in view the progress that human beings have achieved in almost all other aspects of life. The crucial fact is that even after ages of research we have yet not reached any conclusive end. To me it seems to be an indicator to the fact that probably there must be something wrong with the nature of the question itself or there is some conceptual problem associated with it rather than there being any empirical problem. Let us try to explore this possibility and see if it leads to a certain end. Let us try to disentangle the knots that stand as an obstacle in our understanding of the self. For this the first and foremost task will be to clarify the conceptual problems that are invoked while we try to understand the concept of the self. The aim of the conceptual clarifications is to demonstrate the numerous incoherencies that we encounter while we attempt to theorize self, consciousness and the body. This will show the mistakes that are committed and also guide us as to how to avoid them. Therefore, my first and foremost concern is to clarify the conceptual apparatus used in delineating the concept of the self.

The discussions of the major philosopher’s views across the ages on the concept of ‘self, consciousness and the body’ have revealed that there are two major criteria offered as a distinguishing mark of the ‘self’: bodily continuity and psychological continuity. Psychological unity is the unity of conscious experiences. The survey of various philosophical views in the previous chapters shows that most philosophers have proposed either one or the other of the above mentioned criteria. There has been an over-emphasis on unity of consciousness or bodily identity. Because of excessive leaning on one aspect of the reality rather than taking it as a whole that it seems we have not come across a single satisfactory evaluation.

6.3 TAKING CUE FROM WITTGENSTEIN TO SOLVE THE PERENNIAL MIND-BODY PROBLEM

“Philosophers accept the idea that, an unexamined life is not worth living. However, what can philosophers do when the tools required for examining life are not available? Philosophers tend to go at the job with whatever tools are at hand. One tool
that philosophers make heavy use of is language. Wittgenstein was among the first philosophers to try to examine language itself. One of his main conclusions was that philosophers, in taking language for granted, had gotten themselves into the habit of trying to make language do the work that it cannot do. This idea of his that the misuse of language instead of getting us out of philosophical problems instead leads us to deeper problems is one of the important cues that we can take from him to tackle the mind-body problem. Without going into his thoughts on private language argument or access to the inner, we can just recall his repeated declaration that the problems of Philosophy would vanish if we attended properly to language. As an example he reminds us that in thinking about the mind we are often in the grip of a picture whose application we do not fully understand. I have used him as a yardstick to estimate how far the Philosophy of mind has been successful in unveiling the mystery of the mind-body. This will ultimately help us in understanding the self, consciousness and the body with which we are concerned here.

In order to decode the problem of understanding the self; I have applied the Wittgensteinian method of philosophical analysis to this domain. Wittgenstein stands out in particular in his attempt to subvert the seductive theories about mind and consciousness that philosophers since Descartes had puzzled and battled with. Again and again in *Philosophical Investigations* he analyses the philosopher’s overconfident intuitions about what their world mean – what their words must mean, what they think – when they talk about what’s going on in their own minds. Application of his ideas, I hope, will definitely bring to the fore that those philosophers who held the view that reconciliation of consciousness and body into the concept of the self presents an epistemological problem were bewitched by their own intelligence, instigated by conceptual confusions and wrong usage of language. Most of the philosophical problems are due to an excessive tendency on the part of philosophers to theorize even the simplest of human experiences. The problem with which we are dealing is one of the best examples of this. So, even those unsympathetic to Wittgensteinian approach will have to bear with this approach with the hope that this

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may shed genuine light on the issues discussed. For developing my arguments, I have incorporated the famous Wittgensteinian idea of placing everything as it is undistorted before us. By adopting the philosophical ideology propounded by Wittgenstein that work of the right sort merely unties knots in our understanding, my aim has been to show that the problems about mind and body will disappear when we put relevant facts about them undistorted before us. Wittgensteinian methodology has always helped us to reach an end sans knots. Following this path will eventually lead to clarity which will enable us to decode the conceptual confusions that surrounds the philosophical understanding of self, consciousness and the body.

6.4 DECODING THE PROBLEM

6.4.1 Prologue

With the task of decoding the conceptual entanglements that stands as obstacles in knowing our own self, I have started with an analysis of the concept of consciousness so that we get a glimpse of the relation between consciousness and the body and see where they stand in terms of the self. Starting with an analysis of consciousness is important because it is considered to be the most elusive phenomena. The shadow of the alleged mystery regarding consciousness darkens the concept of self too. So, decoding the mystery element propounded by philosophers regarding consciousness should be our first task. It is necessary because to the extent concepts are unclear, to that extent the questions themselves will be unclear. In the following discussion efforts have been made to shed light on the concept of consciousness while trying to show that clarity regarding the conceptual structures involved in disclosure about consciousness has an important bearing on the concept of the body which will eventually lead to a better understanding of the self.

While trying to get a grip of the total picture of the mind-body problem we need to understand the crucial factors responsible for it. Why is it that even after ages of research we have yet not reached any conclusive end? To me it seems to be a indicator to the fact that probably there must be something wrong with the nature of the question itself or there is some conceptual problem associated with it rather than there being any empirical problem. I will try to explore this possibility and see if it leads to a certain end. I
will also try to disentangle the knots that stand as an obstacle in our understanding of the self. For this the first and foremost task will be to clarify the conceptual problems that are invoked while we try to understand the concept of the self. The aim of the conceptual clarifications is to demonstrate the numerous incoherencies that we encounter while we attempt to theorize self, consciousness and the body. This will show the mistakes that are committed and also guide us as to how to avoid them. Therefore, taking cue from Wittgenstein, my first and foremost concern is to clarify the conceptual apparatus used in delineating the concept of the self.

For this I have taken note of the Wittgensteinien advice of taking the whole picture into consideration rather than talking about it in parts in order to capture the real picture. What seems to be advisable is to leave the Cartesian shadow lands and seek out the Aristotelian sunlight, where one can see so much better. The need is 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 be repudiated. It would be far better to adopt Aristotelian notion of totality i.e. human beings as ensouled creatures. Human beings are 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 has a ‘form’ – characterized the soul not as an entity separate from the body but more akin to an array of powers or capacities exhibited by living things. Of course Aristotle’s notion too is not without any flaws. In time, Aristotle’s biological conjectures were modified by subsequent scientific research. But what is important is that we pick out his conception of a human being as a whole being as a backdrop against which further analysis on the concept of self is to be done rather than taking different aspects of human beings and treat them as individual and independent entities. Going back to Aristotelian idea of totality of the human being would definitely get philosophers out of the clutches Cartesianism by giving them a more rational option. One way to do that is to consider directly the relation between our inner and outer lives – between our subjective experience as a whole and the world that we know exists around us – rather than trying to add consciousness as an afterthought to a physical world conceived on principles that do not leave room for it. The unit should
not be an abstracted body or brain but the whole living person. Wittgenstein’s remark that it is only of a human being that it makes sense to say that “Only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; deaf; is conscious or unconscious”8 is useful here. It is only to a living human being that we can ascribe certain things like thoughts, sensations, blindness, deafness, sight and so on. When we attribute sensations or thinking to lower animals, we take the living human being as a paradigm for making such comparisons. The point is that we must attribute consciousness not to a part but to the whole of the human being. We must try to interpret it in terms of the whole human being.

6.4.2 Is Consciousness Really Mysterious?
This idea of qualia or the realm of subjectivity which in turn leads to the mysterious aspect of consciousness demands close scrutiny. One should be wary about labeling something as a deep mystery. There are many things about which we are ignorant. There are many empirical questions we do not know the answers to. There are some subjects about which we are not merely ignorant, but we do not have any clear idea as to how to answer the baffling questions. These subjects and questions may be denoted by the name ‘mysteries’, although, to be sure, one should be careful not to confuse such ‘mysteries’ i.e. forms of ignorance – with what is wonderful and awesome. For there are many things that are wonderful, such as the beauty and fecundity of nature, the impressiveness of the great works of art and that other things that which strikes awe in our hearts, such as great heroism or self-sacrifice, or sublime mountain peaks and raging storms and so on is typically not that of which we are ignorant of. There is a sense of wonder regarding such things that have nothing to do with ignorance.

So, we must take care to avoid assimilating what is puzzling and baffling due to ignorance to what is wonderful or awesome. One must take care not to confuse wonderful things as forms of puzzlement. If we do so, it can be got rid of only by means conceptual disentanglement. One must avoid being hasty in declaring something as mysterious. There are many instances of things being called mysterious due to confused ideas. In such

8 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosopherical Investigation, op. cit., p.82.
cases we do have clear idea of how to discover the truth but have been led astray due to some reason or the other. Such confusions may involve not empirical ignorance and misunderstanding or inadequate theory and theoretical understanding of the intractable phenomena, but conceptual confusion. Conceptual confusion is not the same as error of fact. The latter involves false belief, but the former involves incoherence. It is an error of fact to suppose as Kepler did, that there are only five planets in the solar system or as Descartes did that the pineal gland is the organ in the brain in which signals from the two ears are brought together. But it is a conceptual confusion to suppose that the mind is something mysterious in nature – the mystery of which human beings will never be able to unravel. Of course there is nothing wrong in admitting that consciousness is a truly wonderful aspect of nature.

It is easy to mistake conceptual confusions for empirical ignorance or ignorance about facts. When we do so, we mistakenly suppose that what we need is simply more information and a better theory that will explain the phenomenon that bewilders us. But what we need is more clarity, not so much about the phenomenon as about the concepts we deploy in articulating our lack of understanding. We have a tendency to project the knots that we ourselves have tied to our own understanding about the phenomena. Because of projecting the knots we thereby imagine that that the said phenomena are deeply mysterious beyond the cognitive powers of human understandings. This is exactly the case with the conscious phenomena. Consciousness is a wonderful phenomenon. It is an amazing aspect of nature. Human beings are awestruck with it and thereby label it as something mysterious in haste. And it is this mysterious element that they have been grappling to grasp since time immemorial. Some recent philosophers as we have seen, without any hesitation have declared that consciousness is a mysterious phenomenon. But it is really a sad state of affair to declare so and acknowledge the limitation of human understanding. To think thus is to create a self imposed obstacle in our understanding of ourselves as without understanding consciousness we will never be able to understand our own self.

Consciousness is a fact of our life. It also cannot be denied that the very existence of consciousness and life forms in general fills our minds with a sense of wonder. This sense of wonder instigates our categorization of consciousness as a
mysterious something. Although consciousness is almost certainly a property of the physical brain, the major mystery that remains unsolved is as to how it is possible for neurons which are physical entities to produce the subjective feelings? Here it must be admitted that even though the scientific study of the brain has made remarkable progress but neuroscience has not reached the stage where we can satisfactorily answer question of this sort. But this does not in any way mean that consciousness is a mysterious entity as has been pronounced by many. The sense of deep mystery surrounding it does not stem from factual ignorance but from conceptual entanglements and it can be erased by means of clarification of conceptual confusions. It might be that we already know the answer but has not been able to accept it due to some preconceived notions. In order to get rid of such notions, we must remind ourselves of some simple conceptual truths regarding its nature and location. The quest is not to make some path breaking discoveries regarding the physical conditions that are always causally conjoined with it. What is required is to clear off the debris of conceptual entanglements and misconceptions regarding its existence and functions. What we have to do is to show that the physical basis of consciousness is not something abnormal and mysterious. We have to show that physical and mental items are in some way suitable to each other.

The best way to reach the desired goal is to look into the matter in its totality. When we need to find the connection between two things the ideal procedure is to step back and look at the wider context that encloses them rather than taking each item in isolation. In case of consciousness that wider context is provided by the organic life of the person concerned. If we do so we will realize that there is no miracle associated with consciousness. Consciousness is not a super natural extra but a very natural aspect of life. Consciousness is that distinguishes a person from a machine, a living thing from a corpse. We ascribe consciousness only to living beings and not to a machine however perfect it may be. Why do we do so is an unreasonable question. So, presence of an organic life in a creature is the reason for it being
conscious and there is no mystery element in it. What is striking is that most discussions on consciousness are generally seen to ignore this most important aspect.

6.4.3 The So-called Mysterious Aspects of Consciousness

6.4.3.1 Transitive and Intransitive Consciousness: Let us now try understanding the conscious phenomena by placing facts about it undistorted. First step towards clarity is to distinguish between two forms of consciousness: transitive and intransitive consciousness. Transitive consciousness is a matter of being conscious of something or other is thus or otherwise. Intransitive consciousness there is always an object of which one is conscious. Intransitive consciousness, on the other hand is a mode of being conscious and it has no object. It is a matter of being conscious or awake as opposed to being unconscious or asleep. Intransitive consciousness is not a property of the brain but is predicable of the sentient creature as a whole and not of its parts. Of course it requires that the brain functions normally. Recent philosophy of mind propagates the idea that the brain causes consciousness. But it is wrong to do so. It is not the brain that is conscious or unconscious but the human being whose brain it is. It is wrong to ascribe to the brain i.e. to a part of an animal – an attribute which makes sense to ascribe to the animal as a whole.

Intransitive consciousness is not an object of possible experience for one, but a precondition for any experience. There is nothing private about intransitive consciousness. One can pretend to be unconscious but one cannot pretend to be conscious. This reminds us of the Wittgensteinian view that another person is conscious becomes clear to us if we take the total situation of the person – past, present and future into consideration. In this case there is no space for privacy regarding consciousness. Transitive consciousness on the contrary has many forms – perceptual consciousness, self-consciousness etc. Intransitive consciousness is a pre-requisite condition for various forms of transitive consciousness i.e. being conscious of something at a given time. Transitive consciousness takes many different forms. Transitive consciousness cannot be correlated with any single neurological array of events or processes due to its conceptual complexity. There is probably no reason for such uniform correlations. Due to the complexity involved in transitive consciousness
Chapter 6: Analysis and Conclusion

and due to its many forms it is not easy to understand it. It is this realm of consciousness which is considered to be mysterious. It is due to the difficulty associated in understanding these complex phenomena that we have started addressing it as a problem of qualia. There are many philosophers following Nagel who are fascinated by the qualia aspect of consciousness. Puzzlement amongst philosophers and neuroscientists regarding consciousness is generated by the fact that a merely physical description of the world would omit experience i.e. the behavior that exhibits sorrow, hope, joy, fear, affection etc. So, it is transitive consciousness that is at the root of the problem of mystery that we ascribe to consciousness as a whole. Intransitive consciousness, on the other hand is self-evident.

The extension of the concept of consciousness to encompass the whole range of what its proponents call ‘experience’ or transitive aspect runs parallel to the Cartesian identification of ‘thoughts’ with consciousness. Descartes held that sensation, perceptual experience, imagination, cognition, affection and volition constitute the domain of consciousness. With Descartes the idea of the soul or mind became narrowed to a bare point of consciousness. This parallel is yet another fact of crypto-Cartesianism that characterizes contemporary philosophy of mind. Our task now is to investigate what motivates this extension of the ordinary concept of consciousness and how the notion of experience is misconstrued.

Why should the fact that human beings enjoy experiences of wide variety be thought to constitute a mystery? Why should it be the central problem of philosophy of mind? Viewed from one particular perspective, it can appear deeply puzzling as to how causal transactions in the material world can give rise to anything as categorically distinct from matter as experience. In other words it can appear puzzling as to how the physical or the material can produce something non-spatial as consciousness. One of the most fundamental reasons for holding such a perspective is the divide that Descartes had created. The perspective of the questions mentioned above echoes the Cartesian viewpoint according to which the world consists of two categorically distinct domains – the material (essentially characterized in terms of extension) and the mental (essentially characterized in terms of consciousness). But it is not essential for us to stick to Descartes’ notion as it rests on the false notion of the
dichotomy of the mental and the physical. The segregation of the realm of the mental and physical into water tight compartments is the reason for compartmentalization of the mind and body as well.

But that such a divide is baseless is proved by the fact that even though Descartes played a pioneering role in establishing the dualism of mind and matter as two distinct and independent domains which are entirely separate substances, yet, he himself had to bow down and acknowledge the absurd idea of both the substances interacting in the pineal gland. He even tried to reconcile the opposite substances by bringing in the idea of God. Though he ruled that they were substances of different kinds, he placed them both firmly within the wider system of God’s providence. He thought God must have good reasons for connecting them, even though those reasons are obscure to us. This had to be done as there was no way out for him to explain the reality. This means that contrary to what he propagated he did not actually show souls as totally irrelevant to their bodies. In fact, Descartes surprises his readers by saying twice explicitly that the soul or self is not actually a loose extra added to the body. He wrote: “I am not lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel… I am besides so intimately conjoined, and as it were intermixed with it, that my mind and body compose a certain unity. For if this were not the case, I should not feel pain when my body is hurt.”9 He saw that treating the souls as an alien, arbitrary item raised great difficulties about action and perception, so he assumed some underlying connection. Even the Christian tradition of resurrection of the body supported this. Souls needed bodies, so, God would restore the bodies at resurrection. But unfortunately Descartes occasional statement of this type did not stop him from arguing all the rest of the time that the separation is absolute. But whenever it was required he had no option but to take resort in the illogical claim that except God’s mysterious plan nothing can put the soul and the body together. Spinoza, Leibniz too in some way or the other took resort in God to reconcile mind and matter.

With the phase of enlightenment taking over the constant references to God became less while the conviction of soul and body as separate entities hardened. With the advancement of science and the discoveries made regarding the objective material

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world, matter seemed to be intelligible on its own. With time, mind and body indeed started looking more like ship and pilot and in fact much more than Descartes’ supposition. Philosophers began to wonder whether the pilot was actually needed at all. Descartes’ theistic dualism turned into materialistic monism. Subjective experiences were dismissed as an ineffective extra, a mere by-product, irrelevant to physical reality. That is why people who wanted to seem scientific were not allowed to mention their own or anybody else’s inner experience. The problem was that consciousness was seen as an extra term and philosophers were puzzled as to how to insert it into the existing pattern of the physical sciences and handle it with methods that are recognized by science. This theory did not work well for a long time. Philosophers realized that there was a problem but there was no way of reconciliation within the existing system. Both matter and mind seemed equally real but there was no intelligible way of connecting them.

One of the best ways to connect both is to take the total picture into consideration rather than focusing on just a part of it. What is of utmost importance in such a situation is to step back and consider human beings quite differently – not as loose combinations of two incompatible parts but as whole complex creatures with many aspects that have to be thought about in different ways. Mind and body are more like shape and size than they are like ice and fire or water and oil. Being conscious is not, as Descartes thought, a queer extra kind of stuff in the world. It is just one of the things we do. Consciousness and the body belong to the same self or person. They are something complex as claimed by Locke. The cobbler’s mind needs the cobbler’s body. The cobbler could not be who he is without the connections established by his cobbling. Viewed from this perspective, the experience aspect, which makes consciousness so mysterious and puzzling, seems to be explicable to a certain extent. Conscious experience viewed in this way no longer seems to be that mysterious something that can be known only by means of the first person perspective or by some private method. It is demystified the moment we take into account the reality of life of the conscious being in its totality.

6.4.3.2 Qualia: Another reason for terming consciousness as inexplicable is greatly strengthened by philosopher’s misconceived notion of qualia. It is best explained by
Nagel’s description of subjectivity i.e. “there is something which it is like”\textsuperscript{10} experience. He argued that the fact that an organism has conscious experience at all means, basically, that, there is something it is like to be that organism. That what it is like for the organism is the subjective experience. It is striking, however, that Nagel never tells us, with regard to even one experience, what it is like for anyone to have it. He claims that the qualitative character of the experiences of other species may be beyond our ability to conceive. In deed the same may be true of the experiences of other human beings. It is the problem of explaining these phenomenal qualities that Chalmers and others declare as the root of the problem of explaining consciousness.

But this view of equating consciousness with that of qualia is misleading. The source of the confusion is the thought that experiences are privately owned and privately accessible. It is the first person or private ownership of experiences that is the root cause of our conceptual confusions regarding consciousness. There have been many attempts to explain consciousness in terms of qualia. But all explanations seem to be circular in nature. It fails in providing any necessary information about consciousness except endorsing the indescribability factor of the so-called mysterious consciousness. Thus, we are left at the same point where we started from. I think that if qualia were true, than it would indeed be the case that one person could not know, or could not know for certain, whether and what experiences another person had. But it is not the case and it means that the whole concept of inexplicability of qualia has been hyped to a certain extent.

The notion of qualia can be equated with Wittgenstein’s notion of private language. According to Wittgenstein, private language refers to the possibility of a language which talks about those things which are known only to the user, whose contents are inherently private. He argues that private language is not a language at all. This view of his is supported by the theory of application of language that he propagates in the Philosophical Investigations. A word has no single or fixed meaning. A word acquires meaning in context of a ‘form of life’. A word may be a part of many ‘language games’. The supposition that words have fixed meaning is the

source of much philosophical confusion. Meaning is a complicated phenomenon that is woven into the fabric of our lives. According to Wittgenstein, meaning is a social event and meaning happens between language users. As a consequence it makes no sense to talk about a private language with words that mean something in the absence of other users of language. A language must have some public criterion of identity. Users of private language have no criteria for the correctness of one’s use of a particular word for particular subjective experiences. Private language is thus a result of misunderstandings. Wittgenstein asserts that if something is a language than it cannot be private.

The same arguments that Wittgenstein employed to get rid of private language can be used eschew qualia. If one cannot have private language as Wittgenstein claims than it might not make sense to talk of private experiences or private mental states. So, first of all, we must distinguish between describing the experience and describing the qualities of the experience. Describing an experience is not as difficult as describing the quality of how one feels when undergoing an experience. We generally term the later as something indescribable. What is meant by the idea that qualities of the objects of experience are indescribable is that one cannot describe the qualities of experience: the particular aroma of coffee, the emotions evoked when one falls in love or going through any other emotion, feeling of joy and sorrow and so on. It is in deed difficult to express what one goes through in such situations. But is it because of the nature of such experiences or something else. In my view the difficulties are due to conceptual confusions rather than anything else. The appearance of the indescribability of qualities is due to its non-conformity with the paradigm of descriptions. To describe an objective material thing is to give its properties or qualities. But when asked to describe properties or qualities rather than the object that has these properties or is qualified by these qualities, this paradigm of description does not apply. So it is due to the non-concomitance of our description of qualities of experience to the standard notion of description that we generally employ while describing objective things that we feel let down. In fact as Wittgenstein suggests there is nothing like the paradigm of description. Even if we assume that there is one than the distance from the paradigm of description does not mean that they are
inexplicable. We must understand that there are multiple ways of describing various things according to their nature and there is no need to follow a set standard pattern of description. Like Wittgenstein says that we must understand a certain meaning in the context of the particular form of life that it belongs to, similarly, the description of something instead of being measured by a set rule must be assessed by the various contexts it represents. Different ways of describing or not following a prescribed format of description must not be cited as a reason for preferring one form over the other or calling one particular way as indescribable. So, conscious experience is not indescribable. Only the way we describe it is different from the ways we use in describing other things. Hence, indescribability aspect of qualia is plain misleading. The very concept of qualia is misbegotten progeny of conceptual confusions. The whole idea of equating consciousness with qualia has led to the puzzles and confusions regarding consciousness. It will be difficult to reach an understanding about consciousness as long as we fall victims to the illusions like that of ‘private ownership’ and of ‘privileged accesses’ with regard to experience. We must get rid of the notion of experience as incommunicable qualitative feel or of there being ‘something it is like to have a given experience’. It is only than that we can understand the concept of consciousness.

6.4.4 Neural Events and Conscious Experiences

Another puzzling thing about consciousness is the relationship between the neural events and conscious experiences. How can events in the physical world i.e. neural events give rise to the world of consciousness? In other words, this is an extension or modern way of apprehending the age old mind-body problem. Descartes equated the mind with consciousness and this lead eventually to a phase where philosophers under a blind reductive approach reduced the conscious human being to a brain. Today even brain loses its structure becoming just a standard consignment of chemicals that occurs in the process of neural excitation. Conscious experiences, in other words are reduced to neural excitation. So, the mystery that surrounds us is how to account for the experience aspect or the subjective aspect of consciousness if it is nothing but chemical consignments. So, inexplicability of experiences given rise by consciousness is one reason for the woes related to an understanding of it. In order to ward off
confusions we must probe the concept deeper and find out what causes such
discordances. We have already undermined the concept of qualia as misleading. But just undermining the notion of qualia, however, does not by itself resolve the problems that bewilder neuroscientists and philosophers. The perceived difficulty in accommodating facts about subjectivity in our conception of an objective physical world is another major cause of the problem about consciousness. So, our task now is to find out ways of reconciling consciousness with the physical world.

The problem of reconciling occurs because of the artificial dichotomy that we have created between such terms as – ‘physical’ and ‘mental’; ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’. We have deeply embedded in us misconceptions regarding the nature of reality. We take it for granted that the two realms are not only separate but are opposite of each other. This man-made dichotomy lies at the root of the confusion regarding consciousness and many other philosophically puzzling issues. We forget that there are numerous empirical evidences which stand as a proof to the fact that the two realms are not actually opposed in the way we take it to be. On the contrary they form a part of one whole reality. It is because of our partial perspective of reality that we think that each subject of experience enjoys and undergoes experiences, feels emotions, thinks thought or in other words has conscious experiences which he may keep to himself, or so can be described as having, as we sometimes say, as ‘inner life’ which is distinct from his physical being. This ‘inner life’ is the domain of subjectivity.

Every conscious experience is no doubt someone’s conscious experience. But there is nothing odd or anomalous about it. There is nothing strange or mysterious about it which could generate puzzlement about how to accommodate such facts about subjectivity into an objective world. What we have to do is to take reality in its totality. If we are able to do this, than we will find that the puzzle disappears. If on the other hand, one conceives of ‘conscious experiences’ as a domain of subjectivity that is just the opposite of objective, consisting of qualia, essentially private and accessible only to the subject, known immediately by introspection, incommunicable or only imperfectly communicable, than, the fact that there is such a thing as conscious experience will indeed seem puzzling. For if we think thus we shall want to
understand how something as bizarre as qualia can possibly exist in a physical world. We shall in deed query: How can physical bodies in a physical world contain such phenomenon as consciousness? Qualia experiences with their own peculiar qualitative character seem to emerge from physical events which are produced by the excitation of the neurons. But how can the excitation of neurons produce such a thing as consciousness? If one wants to start from such misbegotten assumptions, than, it will definitely lead to a network of problems. But as said earlier these problems arise out of conceptual confusions and they are to be resolved by disentangling the knots that we have inadvertently tied in our understanding. When the knots are disentangled and when the relevant facts about them are put forth in an undistorted manner, than, we will be surprised to see how we were all caught in the conceptual web. We should follow Wittgensteinian dictum i.e. of placing everything as it is undistorted before us in order to create a stage where there will be complete disappearance of philosophical problems regarding consciousness. By adopting this procedure we have already dealt with the inexplicability aspect of qualia.

It is just misleading to assert that it is a plain fact about the world that it contains conscious states and events which are opposed to matter. Instead the world may be said to contain sentient creatures including human beings who are conscious and who, when, conscious enjoys a wide variety of experiences. Of course, we would want to know how this came about. That is a scientific question about the origin of life to which we have promising answers. Questions in evolutionary biology concerning the evolution of life forms that possess such perceptual, affective, cognitive and other capacities that warrant ascribing experiences in general to them, as well as intransitive and transitive consciousness – to which we also have reasonably good answers. But it creates confusion when we do not accept the evolutionary reality which is responsible for the existence of the whole being. When we talk of a being – evaluation should not be based on whether it is matter or a point of consciousness but the focus should be on the totality of the being where we take the physical aspect and the conscious aspect as a part of the totality. It is a misguided perspective to focus on questions of the sorts as – how physical bodies in a physical
world can contain consciousness or how merely physical systems can have consciousness?

Animals and human beings are not mere physical systems but living, sentient systems. Sentient creatures are conscious living beings. They are conscious of various things. They feel pain, perceive objects in their environment, feel anger or fear, take pleasure in various activities and conditions, desire things and pursue what they want and do many other things. If they are language using, self-conscious creatures, they have the power to realize or recognize how things are with them, and to bear the fact in mind, to be preoccupied with it i.e. to be conscious that things are thus-and-so with them. Sentient beings are very different from mere physical systems. This is so very obvious. They have capacities to acquire knowledge of their environment by the use of their sense-organs, to feel pleasure and pain, to adopt goals and pursue them in the light of their knowledge. It is only a sentient creature that can be a conscious creature. So, when we ask the question – how a physical thing (brain) can be conscious?—it is actually a misguided question. We have argued that it cannot. It is the living being whose brain it is that can be conscious or unconscious. In case of mere physical systems it makes no sense to say whether they are conscious or unconscious. Thus, the question how animals which are just physical systems can be conscious or unconscious is a vague and poorly framed question in biological science. Wittgenstein too seemed to point the same thing when he asserted that, “it seems paradoxical to us that we should make such a medley, mixing physical states and states of consciousness up together in a single report: ‘He suffered great torment and tossed about restlessly.’ It is quite usual; so why do we find it paradoxical? Because we want to say that the sentence deals with both tangibles and intangibles at once – but does it worry you if I say: ‘These three struts give the building stability?’ Are three and stability tangible.”11 If we think of the ‘physical’ as a domain of material things, extended in space, public and tangible, and of the mental as a domain of subjectivity, identical with or consisting of qualia, which are private, accessible to their subject or owner, intangible, have an incommunicable or partly communicable subjective feel, than, we are bound to be puzzled. For, then, we seem to be concerned with two different orders of reality than aspects of one whole being. When in the grip of such a picture of division of reality into

two halves, innumerable mundane sentences suddenly seem paradoxical, mixing up two different ontological realms. In our daily dealings of life we do not bother to query whether something is physical or merely concomitant of a ‘physical system’? Like when Wittgenstein speaks of the struts giving a building stability, we do not feel any paradox. What can be concluded from the above discussion is that the paradox (of the great divide between the physical and the mental) is a bogus one. Both consciousness and physicality belong to sentient creatures and it is deeply misleading to refer to sentient beings as mere physical systems.

6.4.5 Consciousness and Body as Aspects of the Self

Sentient beings are biological systems or more lucidly living beings with the power of sensations, perceptions, cognitions, affections, desires and above all actions. They are self-moving creatures with goals and purposes of their own, which they pursue in the light of what they perceive and know. Their consciousness, intransitive and transitive, their conscious states and experiences are not opposed to their bodies. So, the question – how can consciousness be physical? – is a misguided question offering a pair of bogus alternatives, both of which should be rejected. Only if we have a distorted conception of what reality must be like and an equally distorted conception of the so-called subjectivity can we ask such a question. If by ‘subjectivity’ we mean consciousness of private experiences or qualia, then, we have already argued that it is an incoherent concept. There is and could be no such thing. For qualia thus conceived are no more than the Wittgensteinian notion of ‘private objects’, the conception of which makes no sense. It is only if our conception of reality is distorted that it may seem inconceivable to us that there can be such things as consciousness or conscious beings. The view also lies in holding Physics as the ultimate revealer of what exists and what does not exists. Because Physics cannot account for several factors in human beings like psychological, social and cultural factors which are not the domain of the physical sciences that we tend to undermine the conscious phenomena. Of course, Physics does not suggest that features like consciousness and their properties are not real, or that there is nothing as such. Nor does it suggest or even intimate that the existence of the conscious phenomena is surprising. Sentient beings are both physical and conscious beings. Along with being conscious they are also space-
occupying physical things that consist of matter. Their properties and powers ultimately depend on their physical constitution. But to say that they are only reducible to the physical and microphysical processes that characterize the physical constitution is due to wrong assumptions.

Is consciousness, than, something surprising as Chalmers avers “surprising and unexpected from the objective view point of Physics?”\footnote{David Chalmers, \textit{The Conscious Mind}, op. cit., p.4.} If all we knew were the facts of Physic, would the existence of consciousness be surprising and unexpected, perhaps even mystical? No it is not. The idea that consciousness is unexpected from an objective point of view as we have said is due to certain confusions. We have generated the idea in our mind that the theories of Physics are more objective than other true propositions of any other branch of study. Of course the methodology of other disciplines like psychology, social and cultural sciences are different from the methodology of physical science. But that does not lend its truths greater objectivity than those of other departments of knowledge. The idea is to acknowledge different methodology of knowing the truth. Only because the methodology that we employ in knowing consciousness is not similar to that of other objective things in the physical domain, does not in any way mean that the truth regarding consciousness is inferior to that of physical entities.

Irreducibility of consciousness to Physics does not in any way imply that it is a mystical existence. The misconceived notion that we have formulated that the truth of objective reality is superior to truth regarding subjective elements such as consciousness is one important factor in contributing towards such a mindset. Due to the pressure created by this misconceived notion a time had come whereby an attempt was made to reduce everything to physical reality. But such a plan of logical reduction of all empirical statements to statements of physics went bankrupt decades ago. Only because consciousness is neither reducible to, nor derivable from, statements of Physics is no reason whatsoever for finding the myriad facts concerning consciousness either surprising or unexpected. Once the confusion is removed and our idea of ‘what reality must be like’ becomes clear we will realize our mistake of demarcating and dividing one whole total reality into two absolutely different realms.
Chapter 6: Analysis and Conclusion

– the subjective and the objective. Consequently if we see things right, and shed the heavy load of conceptual confusions that bedevil debates about consciousness, there will be no problem of reconciling ‘subjectivity’ or ‘conscious experience’ correctly understood, with the ‘objective’, or with our conception of ‘what reality must be like’. When conceptual entanglements are solved we will realize that there is nothing wrong in accepting the fact that consciousness or subjectivity can emerge from the brain or the physical being of the person.

6.4.6 Unveiling the So-called Mystery of Consciousness

If one takes consciousness as a private realm of qualia, than, one is bound to be puzzled by its evolutionary emergence. With such preconceived notions in our mind, even if we believe in the evolutionary emergence of consciousness, than, questions of the sort as to how could subjectivity spring into existence through nothing more than an increase in the complexity of the nervous system will keep on bothering us. Seen from this perspective consciousness seems a matter of having ‘images of objects in the brain’ or ‘a movie in the brain’. With such misguided ideas embedded in our minds, we will always be mesmerized by the idea of conscious phenomenon arising out of the irritation caused in the nervous tissues. It is this view about consciousness that makes it difficult for us to reconcile it with matter.

What we need to do is to re-evaluate the whole picture. Rather than taking consciousness as ‘movies going on in the brain’ or ‘inner life’ we should take it as the behavioral response of the creature in the circumstances of life in which it finds itself. Consciousness is a fundamental feature of reality in its own right although its existence depends upon the physical and the biological body. As the biological constitution of a living creature becomes more and more complex, as their nervous systems, perceptual organs and brains become more evolved, more and more forms of apprehension, response and reaction to the environment becomes possible. The neural structures make it possible for a creature to have and exhibit higher forms of sentience. There is a gradual evolution of more and more complex forms of sensitivity to the environment and more and more complex forms of responses. In due course of time because of the ongoing process of evolution, all these complex abilities can
happen only to a sentient creature. There is nothing mysterious about it although there is a lot more for us to know about the neural processes which are responsible for consciousness. If we accept that it is the neural processes that produce consciousness than there is no element of mystery left. On the contrary, it would have been profoundly mysterious if no neural processes were required for an animal to be endowed with consciousness. The very fact that consciousness is ascribable only to living beings makes the talk about it being mysterious fall apart. Unless we are in the grip of philosophical misconceptions, we can have no hesitation whatsoever in attributing sensations, perceptions, emotions, desires and purposes (of varying degrees and forms) to the higher animals. But there is nothing mysterious here, nor is there any profound puzzle.

It is not mysterious that states of consciousness results from mere irritation of nervous tissues. The impression of mystery is generated by looking at the phenomena from the wrong perspective. The idea of an unbridgeable gulf between consciousness and the physical processes is an illusion produced as a consequence of conceptual confusions. In our daily life we encounter many instances where we do not take the existence of such a bridge (between subjective and objective) into account. One such instance is when we are told that someone drank a bottle of whiskey and lost consciousness. We do not feel that something mysterious or miraculous has occurred. It does not strike us that the influence of alcohol involves crossing the unbridgeable gulf. But we do not allow ourselves to employ the same in case of consciousness and physicality and insist in maintaining the gulf. If we get rid of the bridge than only the deep mystery can be explained. The sense that we are confronted by something deeply mysterious stems from our conceptual entanglements. The explanations about the existence of consciousness should be purported to bridge any gulf between brain processes and consciousness for the very existence of the gulf is an illusion. The passage from the ‘physics of the brain’ to the ‘corresponding facts of consciousness’ is not something unthinkable. There is a straight forward inductive co-relation between them and neuroscience has already established it sufficiently.

6.5 CONCLUSION
Thus, consciousness and body are intricately intertwined with each other. They are so intricately interwoven or enmeshed into a complicated network that it is not possible for us to locate exactly what particular kind of body structure or physical structure is required to generate consciousness. But it is beyond doubt that the existence of consciousness necessarily requires a physical base or a bodily organism. Empirical evidences prove that it has to have an embodied existence. It is because of that the study about the conscious phenomena is progressing. In case it was disembodied, than, we would have been left with no other option but to invariably fall back on the sole definition of it as something mysterious beyond the cognition of the human mind. Neither bodiless psychology nor a body without psychology provides any grounding for the sense of identity over time, the sense that one is the same self at successive or widely separated moments. Continuity of the self over time must have both subjective and objective aspects. This can be achieved if we invoke both the connectedness of the stream of experience and continuity of the body together but not by adding one to the other. We can do this only if we think of the self as a conscious human being appropriating its body as itself.

Although the disembodied survival thesis does not seem reasonable enough, yet, it has been popular in the Western Philosophy from the time of the ancient Greek philosophy. Arguments for life after death in the Western philosophical traditions have usually been based on the supposition that the self is not a physical substance, even though at times it is connected to such a substance in the form of the physical body. The ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras, for example, identified the self with the soul and spoke of the body as the prison house of the soul. He suggested that the soul is something distinct from the body because of its immortal nature as compared to the body which is mortal in nature. Some prominent modern philosophers inspired by Descartes’ dualism also advocated this view of life after death. These philosophers do not deny that the body is a part of the self, but they deny that it is an essential part of the self. Such an idea is generated by the idea of dualism of the mental and the material. It entails that the mind is capable of independent existence. In that case the mind will not cease to function at the time of death. Disembodied survival entails that
dualism is true. The central philosophical argument for the immortality of the soul depends on the premise that the soul is immaterial.

Naturalism is incompatible with an invisible afterlife. Entertaining notions about disembodied existence is not reasonable considering that death is mysterious and we cannot know with absolute certainty what happens after we die. In reality there can be no coherent description of the disembodied survival of formerly embodied persons. Personal identity is necessarily connected to the persistence or continuity of the body. So, it is logically impossible for a person to survive the death of his body as a disembodied person. Persons cannot be individuated (or distinguished) from one another except with reference to their physical bodies. Hence, even if there could be disembodied persons, no one could ever distinguish one disembodied person from another. Even if we believe that the self is constituted of mental relations put together in a certain way or is comprised of memory, yet, we will have to take into account the body of a person. What is memory constituted of? Contents of memory relate to the external world and the external world cannot be perceived without the body. Even if we take for granted the possibility of the existence of disembodied beings, yet, memories of the disembodied being will be comprised of his previous bodied existence. Soul or consciousness depends for its functioning on the persistence of a functioning body. So, no human person can survive without a body.

The idea that consciousness and body are compatible and that body is necessarily required for the existence of the conscious phenomenon, rather than leading to the alleged mystery, on the contrary, makes the mystery element disappear. As has been said several times, it is the unity of conscious awareness that leads to a sense of self. The self possesses a mind by dint of its capacity for being conscious. Also the body has a very important role to play in delineating the concept of self. Both body and consciousness play a pivotal role in the identity of the self. The importance of the two aspects in determining the identity of a person or self varies according to the context. In some cases conscious awareness plays a more significant role whereas in some case bodily identity is more important in determining the identity of the self. But what is significant is that both the conscious phenomena and
the body play their own unique role in determining the identity of the self. This view is closest to the intuitive sense of self.

The answer to the problem of reconciliation of the mind-body or consciousness-body is not something new or path breaking. The solution is hidden in a network of possibilities offered by various philosophers across ages as shown in the survey. For the organic unity of a being or self which has body as well as consciousness we can fall back upon Aristotle, Spinoza and Leibniz. Although the metaphysical reasons Spinoza and Leibniz offered for the unity is not acceptable now and that even Aristotle’s view is also not without flaws, yet, the important point is that they somehow or the other accepted the two facets of reality as one. The contemporary philosophers of mind – Dennett, Searle, McGinn and Chalmers all agree about the biological origin of consciousness. This means that all of them accept the body as a necessary part of our conscious experiences. So, the study is moving in the right direction trying to locate the neural events necessary for conscious experiences. Of course, there is a difference in opinion regarding the plausibility of such a project or the procedure for reaching an end. But what is important is that the body is counted as an essential part of the self along with consciousness. For the concept of self as a unity of consciousness we can take cue from Locke, McGinn and Searle. Kant can be credited to have prepared a blue-print about the way the mind works. His belief that we can only know our own self only as it appears to us and can never know it as it is in itself due to our cognitive structure can be said to have paved the way for McGinn’s claim regarding ‘cognitive closure’. Dennet’s criticism of ‘Cartesian theatre model’ and Chalmers’ claim that consciousness has both physical and non-physical aspects are noteworthy. Dennet’s observation that qualia are not something inexplicable as is generally claimed is significant in removing the mystery aspect of consciousness. According to him, the reason that makes us believe that qualia are inexplicable is that sometimes our descriptions do not meet the paradigm of descriptions we have set. He claims that we can explain qualia with the right usage of language and there is nothing mysterious about it. But most of all, Searle must be credited for his efforts to clear misconceptions about the dichotomies—physical/mental, subjective/objective and so on which can be held responsible for
standing as an obstacle in our accepting the simple truth that the mental and the physical can be a part of one whole and thus paved the right way to know ourselves.

Taking clue from the network of possibilities or solutions offered by philosophers across ages I would like to reiterate the commonsensical intuitive notion that in reality both kinds of continuities – continuity of conscious experiences and body – seems to be inextricably enmeshed in the concept of the identity of the self. Continuity of the self over time is supposed to have both of them i.e. objective and subjective aspects. Neither bodiless psychological states nor a body without psychological states provides any grounding for the sense of identity that the self exhibits. Human beings exist in time and history. We cannot abstract their ‘consciousness’ and their ‘bodies’ from the complex and interactive world they live in. We are speaking of the holistic human self here, and we need a dynamic and systematic understanding of them, not one that can be captured in a still picture. It is holistic in the sense that the framework of the self is comprised of a network of interconnected properties of the body and consciousness taken together where the unity and continuity of the self is assured. The need is to adopt this perspective and instead of looking at the self as a problem of separate entities that must be reconciled, we must look at consciousness and the body as a part of a dynamic system. Adopting such a view point will play a significant part in deepening our understanding of the self.