CHAPTER 2

ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHER’S ATTEMPT TO UNVEIL THE MYSTERIES OF SELF, CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE BODY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The journey for the quest of self is a long one but nevertheless it is a fruitful one. It is a journey that mirrors the path of our discovery of us. Here is an account of the ancient Greek philosopher’s attempt to unravel the mysteries of human life. They were the one’s who taught us to delve on metaphysical questions such as – ‘What is the world made of?’; ‘What is the ultimate substance of all reality?’ and so on, thereby, sharpening our enthusiasm to know ourselves and the world around.

The primitive man primarily gave a mythological and somewhat mysterious account of the nature of the mind as he did not have any sound scientific and methodical background of knowledge. They entertained certain beliefs about mind which were vague, unscientific, and devoid of any systematic enquiry, based on and in accordance with the traditions, customs, and superstitions. They thought of themselves only in terms of physical bodies occupying space and suffering its limitations, but at the same time they did believe that within the bodies were a sort of its shadowy duplicate which was quite independent of the bodies. This shadowy vapour was separable from the body temporarily or permanently, untouched by its limitations. It was generally identified with shadow or breath. “The belief most widely current among the people of lower culture is that each man consists, not only of the body which is constantly present among the fellows, but also a shadowy vapour-like duplicate of his body; this shadow like image, the animating principle of the living organism; is thought to be capable of leaving the body, of transporting itself rapidly, if not instantaneously from place to place, and of manifesting in these places all or most of the powers that it exerts in the body during waking life.”¹ In the primitive literatures this entity is indicated by such names as spirits, animus, pneuma etc.

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Professor E.B. Taylor has given a very clear exposition of this concept of “ghost-soul” in his book *Primitive Culture*. He says, “It is a thin, unsubstantial human image, in its nature a sort of vapour, film or shadow; the cause of life and thought is the individual it animates, independently possessing the personal consciousness and volition of its corporeal owner, past or present; capable of leaving the body far behind, to flash swiftly from place to place, mostly impalpable and invisible, yet also manifesting physical powers and especially appearing to man walking or asleep as a phantom separate from the body of which it bears the likeness; continuing to exist and appear to man after the death of that body, able to enter into, and possess and act in the bodies of other man, animals and even things.”

So, the journey for the quest of the self commenced as a breath of life, a shadowy duplicate, which is regarded as the principle of all life movement, marking off a living body from a corpse. In the ancient times it was deeply influenced by the ethico-religious considerations of the people, prevalent at that time. It was characterized by the lack of critical consideration and absence of scientific knowledge. But man’s inherent rationality could not support the primitive, dogmatic and orthodox beliefs about the mind for a long time. It was the ancient Greek philosophers who for the very first time opened their doors to rational intellectual speculations on the self and the world. Let us now take a brief look at the important speculations on self, consciousness and the body by the ancient Greek philosophers.

2.2 PRE-SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY

2.2.1 Ionians

The Ionians were the earliest pioneers of Western philosophical thoughts, science and culture with a spirit of free enquiry. Apart from showing deep interest in cosmology, they also reflected upon the nature of human mind or psyche. For them mind was a part of nature, and the study of mind and the mental phenomenon belonged to the department of the science of nature. The inclusion of the psychical into the physical by the Ionians marks a significant departure from the popular view that held the body and the mind as two distinct substances, as uncompromising and essentially different entities.

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2.2.2 Heraclitus

According to him the never-resting force of becoming that has neither beginning nor end is represented by Fire. Fire is also associated in his theory with mind or spirit. The Fire is psyche and psyche is Fire. Human soul is a part of the universal fiery energy which surrounds and upholds it, through the ‘inhalation’ of which the human soul maintains itself alive. The soul of a man is essentially rational and immortal by virtue of its participation in the world-soul. A close examination of the Heraclitean concept of the mind leads us to deduce some important conclusions about its nature. He believed that Fire, the primordial stuff is indestructible and immortal and the cause of Universal Reason. Fire as the source of universal mind transforms into all things and draws all things back again into it. The soul of a man has claim to immortality only as an emanation of this Universal Reason. In the Heraclitean theory of mind the problem of the mind-body relation, which is of vital importance for Philosophy of Mind is not very difficult to solve. There is no rigid compartmentalization between the mind and the body. Like the entire universe, the mind and the body are also mere phases in the perpetually changing Fire. Fire creates the body and the soul alike. The question of the permanent identity of the soul, the spiritual personality, abiding through all the multiplicity of experience does not arise because the universe is nothing but a creation of incessant Flux which is the fundamental substratum of all existence. There is no place for cessation, gap and changelessness in the philosophical scheme of Heraclitus. Mind is the essence of all, the law of the universe and the only truth.

2.2.3 Pythagoras

He adopted a new approach to the study of the problem of mind on the basis of religion and morality. The doctrine of soul forms the main pivot of his philosophy. For Pythagoras the soul is absolutely different from nature. Rather the soul can be said to be opposed to nature. The soul is thrust into the life of nature. Its origin is supra-mundane and its true being lies in the supernatural existence as pure spirit. Thus, the Pythagorean concept of the soul seems to be vitiated by the popular religious and theological influences and fails to give a methodical account based on the objective enquiry into the nature of the problem.
2.2.4 Parmenides

“For Parmenides the mind of man depends for its existence upon the mixture of two ingredients of which everything, including its body is composed. These ingredients are the opposite elements of the ‘Light’ and ‘Night’ (the Warm and the Cold, Fire and Earth).” The nature of a man’s mind and thoughts are dependent on the dominating element in an individual. Even the dead man (who has a still body) has feelings and sensations but these powers are deserted by the warm and the fiery and given to the cold, the dark and the silence. Parmenides gave only a passing thought to the problem of the nature of mind and he was primarily occupied with the study of Being. He said about the soul as “that the deity that rules the world at one time sends it out of the Invisible into the Visible, and at another time back and again. Here, the soul is no longer a condition arising from the mixture of material elements, but an independent being credited with pre-existence before its entry into the Visible, e.g. before its entry into the life of body, and also with the continued existence after its separation from the realm of Visibility and indeed, with a sojourn, several times repeated in these two worlds.”

2.2.5 Zeno

One of Permanides’ disciples was Zeno of Elea, the great dialectian. He regarded the soul as composed of exactly equal mixture of four elementary properties of matter – the warm, the cold, the dry and the wet. The notion of the soul propounded by Zeno as that of corporeal entity came as a startling contrast to his advocacy of pure reason and unconditional denial of the validity of the sense.

2.2.6 Empedocles

Empedocles does not mean by mind something like a pervading substantial soul, but by mind he seems to have understood a capacity of bringing together and synthesizing the discrete sense-activities. The capacities of sense-perception and thought are vital expressions of matter and are inextricably bound up with the organism, whether of

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men, beasts or plants. But Empedocles did not confuse the psychical activities with the permanent pervading entity which is more appropriately termed as soul. As a mystic, he says that the soul is something divine and is not inextricably bound up with the material organism. It is not an epiphenomenon of the material elements, nor is it forever bound up with it. But, rather, it is a stranger in this world and enters into foreign and hostile surroundings of the organism which possess such senses as those of sense-perception, feeling and faculty of reason. It is identical neither with material elements nor with psychical processes. It exists unmixed as incapable of mixture alongside the body and its faculties which have life only when united with the souls which is also the principle of life. To Empedocles, the soul is of divine race, too noble for this world. But in the later period of his life Empedocles seems to have been influenced by the mystic and theological concepts of the soul that were prevalent at that time. He makes insurmountably difficult attempts to synthesize these two antagonistic concepts in his system. In his later writings he was committed to the dualistic philosophy of mind.

2.2.7 Leucippus

His most important view on philosophy of mind was his belief that the soul is made up of atoms. He was one of the earliest exponents of materialism and his philosophy of mind is riddled with all the defects that are inherent in any theory of materialism.

2.2.8 Democritus

The Soul, according to him is composed of the fine, round and smooth atoms. The finest of all atoms compose the Fire and the Soul. In the history of Greek thoughts, Democritus, for the first time explicitly denies immortality to the soul and propounds a thorough going empirical concept of the mind.

2.2.9 Anaxagoras

He gave a diametrically opposite picture of the human mind from his predecessor, Democritus. For him the mind is a simple, unmixed and unchangeable entity which is absolutely incorporeal and immaterial in nature. He speaks of the mind as if it were a
fluid substance. According to him all material things are infinitely mixed. The only thing that is unmixed is the mind and it is altogether separate and distinct. Mind is the power of will and thought at the same time. The insightful and omniscient nature of the mind plans and orders the universe and at the same time keeps itself away from pollutions of matter. It is almost self-contained, personified, transcendent, divine power, ruling the world from without. It is also the source of life and movement and hence immanent in the universe. But Anaxagoras’ conception of the mind is not rationally justifiable. If the mind is absolutely unmixed and simple than what is the relation that holds between the body and the mind? It cannot both be the power of thought and life and transcendent at the same time. So, there are many loopholes in his account of the mind and body like that of the other ancient theories of the mind.

2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY GREEK PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

Two very distinct philosophical thoughts dominated the early Greek period:

1) The first is the view that the soul is a divine being which has been thrown down into the corporeal world due to its sin against God, and as its original sin disappears; it will be re-united with God.

2) The second is the concept of the nature as invoked in the philosophical speculations of those who believed souls to be a part of the vast and all pervading living nature.

A study of the early Greek Philosophy of mind reveals that it was during this period of time that the ideas of philosophy of mind had started budding which later on bloomed into the philosophical systems of Plato and Aristotle. The philosophical speculations of the early Greeks led to a whole host of diverse thoughts on the concept of the self and the body. Their concept of the soul differed in many ways from the modern views. It was much broader than the modern perception and more closely connected to basic bodily functions. The soul was considered as the first and foremost principle of life; as something which animates the body. Although the soul was accountable for the ability to think, perceive, imagine, and reason, it was also held to be responsible for biological processes such as respiration, digestion, procreation, growth and motion. The Greek Philosophy mostly represents a corporeal
or physicalist model of the soul. They 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 the seen real. It led to speculations regarding the nature of reality: whether it was physical or something mental. This can be said to be the initiator of the mind-body problem in Philosophy. A reaction to the views can be traced in the teachings of the Sophists who were skeptics and believed that we will never be able to ascertain the truth regarding the self as there is nothing like ultimate truth because of the fact that truth is relative and a subjective thing. Professor Harris remarks, “Just as Descartes’ method of doubt was the beginning of modern epistemology, so the skepticism of the Sophists raised the problems for the Greeks, and at once champions emerged who were ready to meet the challenge.”\(^5\) Into this idea-rich environment came three Athenians whose thoughts dominated the philosophical scene for a very long time. These greatest of thinkers were: Socrates, Aristotle and Plato collectively addressed as the classical Greek philosophers.

### 2.4 CLASSICAL GREEK PHILOSOPHY

#### 2.4.1 Socrates

He was the proponent of the idea that the essence of the objects of true knowledge was something immaterial. The soul, which is the knower, is akin to them in nature. The soul is a purely spiritual entity whose essential nature lies in the cultivation of wisdom and virtue. Socrates was primarily a moral teacher, who adopted a special dialectical method to convince the people about the nature of truth and virtue and evolved a concept of the soul to support his own moral teachings. Socrates combined the idea of the soul as the normal waking consciousness with that of the divine and spiritual. The soul according to him is distinct from the material universe.

He believed in the reincarnation of an eternal soul which contained all knowledge. He believed that we unfortunately lose touch with that knowledge at every birth, and so we need to be reminded of what we already know (rather than learning something new).

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2.4.2 Plato

He is one of the greatest and the most influential thinkers of the world who contributed to the development of every aspect of human knowledge and understanding. He can be understood as an idealistic and a rationalistic like Pythagoras but much less mystical than him. He divided reality into two halves: spirit and phenomena. Phenomena are appearances of things as they seem to us and are associated with matter, time and space. They are manifestation of the ideal. They are illusions which decay and die. Ideals, on the contrary, are perfect and phenomena are definitely inferior to the ideals.

Plato applies the same dichotomy to human beings. Perhaps the closest we come to a Cartesian concept of the soul in ancient Greek thought would be him. The body according to him is material, mortal and moveable and on the other hand the soul is ideal, immortal and unmoved. Some of Plato’s view on soul can be found in Phaedo which was also known to the ancient readers as On the Soul. The soul as is conceived of in the Phaedo is not simply the mind as we conceive of it in the modern times. Plato’s usage of the term is broader than what we mean by the mind today. The argument from Phaedo that sheds light on what Plato takes the nature of the soul to be is the affinity argument (78b – 80b of Phaedo). It begins by distinguishing between two kinds of things: on the one hand, things that are perceptible composed of parts and subject to dissolution and destruction, and on the other hand, things that are not perceptible but intelligible, not composed of parts and are exempt from dissolution and destruction. To the former category belongs the body and it is the later that the soul belongs to. Since only material things are observed to be subject to dissolution and destruction, Plato took the soul’s immateriality as grounds for its immortality. Immortality to Plato is the soul’s chief characteristic. The Republic also sheds a great deal of light on Plato’s conception of the soul. In it he explicitly integrates a number of central features of the ordinary notion of the soul. The following in The Republic "And it will produce natural effects also in the individual. It renders him incapable of action because of internal conflicts and division of purpose, and sets him at variance with himself and with all who are just……But the man who has a good life is
prosperous and happy, and his opposite the reverse,” suggests that Plato took the ordinary notion of the soul, in all its richness and bewildering complexity, to be well-formed and coherent to be capable of supporting the requirements of his idealistic philosophy. One way he does it in *The Republic* is by explicitly integrating a number of central features of the ordinary notion of the soul, namely; responsibility for the life of an organism, for cognitive and intellectual functions, and for moral values such as courage. In the Book 4 of *The Republic*, the soul is divided between three parts which roughly correspond to reason, emotion and desire. Out of these, reason as the superior quality is like a charioteer to control the inferior qualities – emotion and desire. Justice is explained as a ‘suitable harmony’ between all these three parts. Towards the end of first part of *The Republic*, Socrates offer Thrasymachus an elaborate argument to the conclusion that “injustice is never more profitable than justice.” Depending on the condition of the soul a person can be better or worse at doing things. The just person whose soul is in the best condition, is truly excellent at living a human life; in that they are excellent at doing the various things that are importantly involved in living a distinctly human life.

For Plato, the soul is purely spiritual essence; it contains nothing within it that is material. The soul is incorporeal in nature and belongs to the realm of the invisible which is untouched by any material element. Its most important characteristic function is to ‘know’ and most peculiar excellence is ‘wisdom’. The soul is the part because of which real knowledge i.e. knowledge of Forms is possible. This is the central function of the soul as depicted in the *Phaedo*. *The Republic* acknowledges more functions of the soul. A glimpse of the elaborated functions can be seen in the famous allegory of the cave.

After a brief study of Plato’s conception of the soul, let us now try to understand his views on the notion of the body. The body according to Plato is a material thing and it belongs to the perceptible phenomenal world. The body is capable of independent existence. The idealist that Plato was led him to believe that the body is an impediment to the attainment of knowledge.

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7 Ibid
Even though soul and body co-exists, they are two distinct kinds of substances. The real person is not the body but the soul. He says, “We ourselves (i.e. man) are partly body and partly soul.” Hence he is also called a dualist. The same dichotomy that Plato applies in his conception of reality is also applicable to his conception of the body and the soul. From his doctrine that learning is a recollection we can assume that the soul exists before the body does. The soul survives the death and destruction of the body. Plato furnishes the conceptual framework needed for saying that the body and the soul differ in kind, the one being perceptible and the other being intelligible and exempt from destruction. The idea of the transmigration and immortality of the soul in contrast to the body is put forward in *Phaedo* where with the help of the cyclical argument (70c-72d) he tries to show that a creature’s death involves the continued existence of the soul in question, which persists through a period of separation from the body and then returns to another animate body in a change which is the counterpart of the previous change, dying. According to the argument offered in the *Phaedo*, the soul is immortal because it has life essentially, the way fire has heat. It is evident that both of these arguments apply to the souls of all living beings including plants (70d-71d) and the final argument explicitly appeals to the idea that it is the soul that animates the body of a living thing. He says, “What is it that, when present in the body, makes it living? – A Soul.” Death is the separation of the body and the soul but that does not cause the soul to cease to exist. Death is not the end of personal existence. The soul survives after death. The soul will later be put into another body. It is the theory of the soul as the ultimate eternal reality that leads to his theory of the transmigration of the soul. Thus in conceiving the qualities of the self to be in contrast with those of physical things, Plato was obviously under the influence of considerations derived from traditional religion among other sources.

### 2.4.3 Aristotle

There were many things on which he disagreed with Plato. Aristotle was a scientist and a philosopher. In contrast to Plato’s partly mythical attempt he approached the concept of soul from an essentially scientific perspective, employing elements of

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biologoy and metaphysics that encompassed everything from the concepts of
substances, form and matter, to those of potentiality and actuality. While Plato
separates the ever changing phenomenal world from the true and eternal ideal reality,
Aristotle on the other hand, was of the opinion that the ideal was found “inside” the
phenomena, the universals “inside” the particulars. What Plato called idea or ideal,
Aristotle called essence and he referred to the opposite as matter.

According to Aristotle a living creature is a ‘substance’. Body = matter; Soul =
form. His views on the body and the soul are reflected in the passage, “Substances are
by general consent (taken to include) bodies and especially natural bodies; for they
are the principles of all other bodies. Of natural bodies some have life in them, others
not; by life we mean self-nutrition and growth (with the correlative decay). It follows
that every natural body which has life in it is a substance in the sense of a composite.
But since it is also a body of such and such kind, viz. having life, the body cannot be
soul; the body is subject, or matter, not what is attributed to it. Hence the soul must be
a substance in the sense of the form of a natural body having potentially within it. But
form is actuality, and thus the soul is the actuality of the body.”

His theory of the body, soul and the mind is presented primarily in De Anima
(On The Soul). Here he comes very close to providing a comprehensive, fully
developed account of the soul in all its aspects and functions, an account that
articulates the ways in which all of the vital functions of all animate organisms are
related to the soul. The relation between soul and body, on Aristotle’s view, is an
instance of the more general relation between form and matter. A soul is a principle
that accounts for change and rest in the particular case of living bodies, i.e. plants,
nonhuman animals and human beings. The mind or the soul is “the essence” of the
body, the realization of the body. Matter is without shape or form or purpose. It is just
’suff’, pure potentiality without actuality. Essence is what provides the shape or the
form or purpose to matter. Essence is “perfect”, “complete”, but it has no substance,
no solidity. Essence and matter need each other. Essence realizes (makes real) matter.
“Aristotle may be thought of as the first functionalist. In his discussion of definition –

10 Brian Beakley and Peter Ludlow, eds., The Philosophy of Mind: Classical Problems, Contemporary
which he takes to express the formula, or essence, of a thing – Aristotle describes objects as combinations of form and matter. He argues that there are many cases where the form of the object is what’s essential to being such an object, while matter is not. For example, a sphere made of bronze has its geometrical shape as an essential part of being a sphere, but it is, as a sphere, only coincidentally made of bronze (since it would still be a sphere even if it were made of tin or marbles). Because the form of a sphere can be realized in many different substances, we know that the form and the material substance are not identical. Contemporary philosophers would call this a multiple instantiation argument, for it appeals to the fact that a single form can be “instantiated” (realized) in many different physical substances. Although, as it turns out, the form of the soul is only realized in material like bones and muscles, Aristotle warns that we should not make the mistake of thinking of this matter as essential to the mind – just as, if the only spheres we ever saw were made of bronze, we would still not count the bronze as a defining aspect of spheres.”

The soul of an animate organism, in this framework, is nothing other than its system of active abilities to perform the vital functions that organisms of its kind naturally perform, so that when an organism engages in the relevant activities (e.g., nutrition, movement or thought) it does so in virtue of the system of abilities that is the soul. Given that the soul is, according to Aristotle’s theory, a system of abilities possessed and manifested by animate bodies of suitable structure, it is clear that the soul according to Aristotle, is not itself a body or a corporeal thing but are very different from bodies.

He believed the soul, as the form to the body’s matter, the culmination of its capacities. The soul is the source of nourishment, growth, locomotion, desires, feelings and perception of the organism. With the help of the illustration of the eye and vision, Aristotle tries to explain his understanding of the distinction between the body and the soul – “What is a soul? – An answer which applies to it in its full extent – It is a substance in the sense which corresponds to the definite formula of a thing’s essence. That means that it is ‘the essential whatness’ of a body of the character just assigned…… Suppose that the eye were an animal – sight would have been its soul, for sight is the substance, or essence of the eye which corresponds to the to the

11 Ibid, p.4.
formula, the eye being merely the matter of seeing, when seeing is removed the eye is no longer an eye, except in name – it is no more a real eye than the eye of a statue or a painted figure. We must now extend our consideration from the “parts” to the whole living body, for what the departmental sense is to the bodily parts which is its again, the whole faculty of sense is to the whole sensitive body as such….From this it indubitably follows that the soul is inseparable from its body, or at any rate that certain parts of it are (if it has any parts) – for the actuality of some of them is nothing but the actualities of their bodily parts.”

Another analogy Aristotle uses to explain the distinction between the body and the soul is by using the analogy of an axe. In case, an axe was to be a living thing, than, its body would have been made of wood and metal. However, its soul would be the thing which made it an axe i.e. its capacity to chop. If it lost its ability to chop, it would cease to be an axe – it would simply be wood and metal. Likewise, a dead animal is only an animal in name only – it has the same body but it has lost its soul. What is important for Aristotle is the end purpose of something – an axe chops, an eye sees, an animal is animated and so on. This is what is meant by ‘teleology’.

According to Aristotle’s theory, though theoretically the mind and the body may be distinguished, in practice they are indistinguishable. The body and the soul are not, as Plato would have it, two distinct entities, but are different parts or aspects of the same thing. The soul being the form of the body cannot be independent of it. It is impossible to think of matter without form. The soul of an animate organism is nothing other than its system of active abilities to perform the vital functions that the organism engages in the relevant activities like nutrition, movement or thought etc. It does so in virtue of the system of abilities that is its soul.

Like Plato, Aristotle too postulates three kinds of souls, although slightly differently defined. There is a plant soul, the essence of which is nutrition. Then there is an animal soul, which contains the basic sensation, desire, pain, pleasure and the ability to cause motion. Last but not the least, is the human soul. The essence of the human soul is the ability to reason. It can be said that this view of his seems to be in

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anticipation of the modern evolutionists in which he asserts that the soul being the form of the body constitutes several stages in evolution. The most rudimentary forms in the evolution of the self are the nutritive and reproductive soul of the plant life, next comes the sensitive and appetitive soul of the animals and finally there is the rational soul of human beings. In each of these, the higher presupposes and is subserved by the lower. Aristotle’s theory of evolution made a really great contribution to the philosophy of the ancient Greece, and remained influential for many centuries to come. Professor Harris aptly writes, “Aristotle is, indeed, one of the greatest figures in the history of philosophy whose thoughts though inevitably a product, rises above the special viewpoints of the time and comes nearer to grasping the eternal truth which is the goal of the whole historical perspective.”

As a metaphysician Aristotle speaks that besides the vital powers of the living individual organism, there lives in man a spiritual being which thinks and conceives. The thinking mind is not bound to the body. He says, “Thus, than in the soul which is called mind (by mind I mean that where-by the soul thinks and judges) is, before it thinks, not actually any real thing. For this reason, it cannot reasonably be regarded as blended with the body: if so, it would acquire some quality e.g. warmth or cold, or even have an organ like the sensitive faculty: as it is, it has none.” So, Aristotle does not think that there is an organ of thought, and so he also does not think that the exercise of the ability to think involves the use of a bodily part or organ that exists specifically for this use. Nevertheless, he does seem to take the view that the activity of the human intellect always involves some activity of the perceptual apparatus, and hence requires the presence, and proper arrangement, of suitable body parts and organs; for he seems to think that sensory impressions are somehow involved in every occurrent act of thought, at least as far as human beings are concerned. Contrary to the Platonic position, Aristotle conceives that even human souls are not capable of existence and (perhaps as importantly) activity apart from the body. Aristotle does not allow the possibility of the immortality of the soul. The soul is simply the Form of the body, and is not capable of existing without the body. The soul is that which makes a

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13 Harris E. Errol, op. cit., p.107.
person a person rather than just a lump of meat. Without the body the soul cannot exist. The soul dies along with the body.

A criticism usually raised is that Aristotle’s theory treats mental functions and other vital functions exactly alike obscuring a crucial distinction. This worry, however, turns out to be unjustified. The theory treats mental and other vital functions alike only in that it views both kinds of functions as performed by natural organisms of the right kind of structure and complexity. Viewing mental and other vital functions in this way is perfectly compatible. Though Aristotle was not fully successful in his attempt at eliminating the substance theory of the mind and the dualism of mind and matter, his success was, nevertheless, remarkable and exercised considerable influence on the subsequent course of the philosophy of mind.

Aristotle thought of the soul not so much as an entity, but more as a life principle – the aspect of a person that provides the powers or attributes characteristic of the human being. One of the greatest contributions of Aristotle to the philosophy of mind is his attempt to integrate mind and nature, matter and form. He filled up the Platonic gap between thought and sense experience, matter and mind. Metaphysicians before Aristotle discussed the soul abstractly without any regard to the bodily environment. Aristotle was the first one to attempt a reconciliation of the two and hence his philosophy on body and soul stands out.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The study of the Greek Philosophers, for sure, reiterates the fact that Western intellectual history began with them. It was the Greeks who ended a long dark age and started the intellectual ball rolling in the West. Like all other aspects of knowledge, the seed of Philosophy of Mind in Western Philosophy was also sowed by them. “Know thyself” – inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi very well illustrates the Greek inquisitiveness to unravel the mystery of human life.

The earliest substantive study of self, consciousness and body probably occurred during this age. These men all taught and thought extensively on topics pertaining to consciousness. Various aspects of consciousness were addressed in the
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written dialogues of Plato and the works of Aristotle. In fact, the views of Plato and Aristotle continued to dominate thoughts about consciousness and body for a very long time. Gilbert Ryle while initiating his famous attack on Descartes’ dualism as the “official doctrine” emphasized that the ancient Greek belief that the theorizing or intelligent part of the person was the mind was the root cause of the Cartesian Dualism. He says, “…both philosophers and laymen tend to treat intellectual operations as the core of mental conduct; that is to say, they tend to define all other mental conduct-concepts in terms of concepts of cognition. They suppose that the primary exercise of minds consists in finding the answers to questions and that their other occupations are merely applications of considered truths or even regrettable distractions from their consideration. The Greek idea that immortality is reserved for the theorizing part of the soul was discredited, but not dispelled, by Christianity.”15

So, this indicates the impact of Greek thought on the traditional and contemporary discussions in the philosophy of mind. The whole mind-body problem owes it existence to Greek’s belief system that thinking is the domain of the mind. Thus, the hypothesis that the soul and the body are separable is therefore as old as Greek philosophy. The deep impressions left by Platonic dualism and Aristotelian monism in shaping the views of the early modern philosopher’s conception of the mind and body needs to be acknowledged.