CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION
So far we have studied the nature of the self and our study has been in the line of Analytical philosophy. The doctrines regarding the nature of the self have been broadly divided into three theories and we have discussed these theories of the nature of the self. Now the question that arises is whether these theories have succeeded in revealing the true nature of the self or not.

From what we have already discussed about the 'unity of mind' of a person and the integrating power of self-consciousness, the Body Theory appears to be a non-starter since the unity of consciousness is not a matter of causal relatedness produced by the body. As we have said, the unity in question here is constituted by self-consciousness while the unity conferred by the body is a mere succession of mental states in relation to the body in question.

But, when we apply the survival test we get a decisive answer to the problem. Let us imagine a case of multiple brain transplantations. By surgical means the brain of A is planted in the body of B and vice versa.
Then surely they both, we would say, occupied the others's body. What we identify as A is no longer the person A and similarly in case of B. This is because we know that the brain of a person carries the 'point of view' of the person upon himself and upon the world. It is important to remember that the shift of identity in the case under consideration does not consist in the shift of brains. We are not saying that the self of A goes to the body of B because the brain is the self but only because as a matter of fact the brain is the carrier of the reference of 'I'. This is obvious from the fact that a heart transplant, for example, would not result in a transfer of the self in the manner of the brain transplant. It follows, therefore, that the body though it normally identifies a person does not constitute his identity. Consequently in the above case we will have to stop identifying person A by the body A, and similarly with B. (variations of this theory has been discussed in chapter III).

The Body Theory is based on the proposal that bodily identity is the criterion of personal identity. But it is obvious from the above considerations that
we cannot hold bodily identity as the required criterion in the required sense, since the body does not constitute the identity of the person in question.

We can now move on to the consideration of the second type of theories which we have called the Mind Theory discussed in chapter IV. As we have said that according to this theory reference of 'I' is a complex entity mentally constructed out of the mental states which are ascribed to a self. In this view certain kinds of relations between the mental states of the self fix the identity of the self. Our enquiry is then directed to finding out what kind of mental relation will serve as the criterion of personal identity. We can discard the idea that the relation of exact similarity is the required criterion. Exact similarity perhaps holds as the criterion between the successive states of a material object. But obviously it cannot hold in case of mental states since they are constantly in flux. Moreover, different individuals can be in a similar state in a given moment of time, but they could hardly be called the same self. Hume has noted the constant flux of mental states of a given individual and introspectively not finding
a mental entity to be identified as self, he declared
the entire series of successive mental states as constit­
tuting the self. In his terminology the self is a 'bundle
of perceptions'. Here he seems to be suggesting that
causal succession is the relation which will serve as
the criterion of the required identity. But obviously
this suggestion is unsatisfactory. In Hume's own view,
in the first-person perspective one does not discover
a causal relation to serve as uniting medium to make
the succession into a "bundle". It is not surprising
that Hume's theory does not provide a criterion for
personal identity since he rejects the naive notion of
the self altogether. Nor it is surprising that Hume could
not find the self when he looked into himself since by
definition the self is the subject to whom the act of
looking into oneself is ascribed.

The most promising perhaps, certainly long debated
mental relation as the criterion comes from the philo­
sophy of Locke discussed in chapter IV. This is the rela­
tion of memory. Memory is a causal relation between past
experiences and present mental states. Could memory be
the criterion of personal identity? The question of
criterion is dealt with successfully by asking if a proposed item is a necessary and sufficient condition of whatever it is the criterion of. Is memory a necessary condition of personal identity? The answer seems to be clearly no. In amnesia people forget even their own descriptive identity. But surely they continue to be the same person. Is memory a sufficient condition of personal identity? On the face of it the answer seems to be yes, since one can remember only one's own experiences. So claim of personal identity based in memory is eo ipso correct. But unfortunately as a criterion of this sufficiency is deceptive. Since as the celebrated remark of Butler says that memory presupposes personal identity and therefore does not constitute it. We have already noted that our required criterion has to prove its worth in a sense of 'constituting' personal identity. In other words, there is a circularity here. Furthermore, we can apply the survival test to settle this issue. Imagine a case where all of a person's memories and other traits of character are erased by supertechnology and a new set of 'memories' etc. is put in its place. Will the persons survive such a treatment? It seems reasonable to suppose in this case that the person in question
continues to be the same self even though he lost his original memories. According to the new set of memories he may himself claim to be a different person, but we who know the truth about how it has come about would explain to him who he really is and why he is claiming to be a different person. This idea is clearer if we imagine a case in which the person concerned remains conscious throughout the transplant. We are to imagine him conscious of his memories disappearing and acknowledging his new identity without a gap in consciousness but without realising that it is a new set of memories. In this case he will certainly claim to be the person which his memory tells but he will assert his continuity as the person who submitted himself to this operation. In other words, even though in the qualitative sense (distinguished earlier) we have a new self embodied in the new set of memories, it is clear that in the quantitative sense the same self persists. It follows therefore, that memory is not a sufficient condition either.

To explore this thing fully contemporary philosophers have considered what are known as 'fission' and 'fusion' cases. In case of fission we are to imagine
that the two hemispheres of one brain are separated and each of this is transplanted into two other brainless living bodies. From the assumption that brain is the carrier of the self's point of view upon the world and the assumption that the two halves of brain are functionally identical, it will follow that both the two newly created individuals will carry the personality of the person whose brain has been separated, and both will announce their identity with this person. Applying the survival test then we raise the question if both the newly created selves can be seen as identical to form a self. The answer seems to be clearly no, because the identity signifies one-to-one relation and in the case in view two different individuals claim their identity with the former, a third self. In a sense, i.e., qualitatively they both seem to be identical with the former self but logic does not allow us to claim this identity. However, supposing one of the two newly created ones does not gain consciousness and dies, what will be our judgement about the identity of one which is successful? It seems clear that our temptation would be to say that this one is identical with the former self, as we have seen, we would say in a case of a whole brain transplantation. Also in this case one-to-one relation obtains and
no logical hitch arises. But this is an extraordinary situation in which both halves of the brain worked well and we have said that neither of them represented the identity relation with the former. In other words we said that double success was a failure but when only one half succeeds we call it a success. How can a double success be a failure? The conclusion that can be drawn from this seems to be that the survival of not only memory but the total psychological personality cannot be considered as sufficient for the claim of identity. Is such a psychological continuity even necessary for personal identity? For the reasons discussed earlier, in case of memory we can safely conclude that it is not.

The fusion cases are discussed to the same effect. We can imagine that two half brains, as above, are united and transplanted in a third person. The third person will contain the memories of both the donors and may form a selective whole from the personality traits of the donor. In this case the resulting person is not exactly alike any of the former persons but fairly alike both of them. However, we will not be able to claim that the resulting person is identical with any of the former
person or with both of them. The reasons here are similar to what we stated in the fission cases.

Lastly however, these cases have been read differently by the most discussed philosopher Derek Parfit. In judging of such cases of fission and fusion Parfit invokes the doctrine of 'Survival Without Identity'. In a sense he claims that though identity is one-to-one relation survival is not. Thus in the fusion case discussed above, Parfit would say that both have survived and similarly in Fission case Parfit would say that in both halves of one brain the original person has survived. In other words, we can have survival of one into many and of many into one without invoking identity of any with any. The morale to be drawn from Parfit's doctrine is that the question of personal identity is somewhat a spurious question. Once we have settled the question of survival in the cases considered above, there is nothing more to be added by raising the question of personal identity. In other words, the self is not a substantial entity whose identity over time is a problem. One self can survive as many, provided there is a 'psychological continuity' between the one and the many. The
'psychological continuity' is conceived as a causal relation between a whole set of memories and personality traits and another set of memories and personality traits irrespective of how this connectedness is realized.

Parfit's theory can be criticized in the following two ways: Firstly, Parfit's morale of a self surviving as many selves is akin to the way in which we can talk of one plant surviving into many. The brain can be cut into many and imagined to retain its functional capacity as the original single brain. But can this sort of thing be imagined to happen to a self? Our ordinary notion of the self prohibits us to imagine so. Since the self is necessarily individualistic in the sense that one cannot intelligibly imagine its division, it seems that the model in question must be rejected. If a self cannot be seen as divisible in the way stipulated above, in what sense can a self be seen to survive as many? Surely for a self to survive as many it has to multiply itself in some way. But it is this very idea that seems unintelligible. The second argument derives from a certain peculiarity of our awareness of ourselves. In phenomenological reflection the continuity of self appears to
be a fact over and above the fact about the continuity of other mental and physical properties ascribed to the self. Thus it is possible that with reference to a future person when all the facts about his mental life seem to be similar and even causally continuous with my mental life at present, I may intelligibly ask "Will that person be me"? That is, the question of one's continued identity seems to be independent of the question of the continuing similarity or causal relatedness of other attributes (mental and physical) ascribed to one.

The failure of the above approach to personal identity has inclined some philosophers to look for the criterion of personal identity in identity of the brain. The suggestion here is summed up in the slogan "where goes the brain there goes the person". But now in the context of personal identity, what will be the criterion of the identity or the sameness of the brain. Obviously we cannot say that "where goes the brain of the same person there goes the same person." This will be circular. The other criterion of sameness of the brain is the same as of any other material object, namely, spatio-temporal continuity. But this criterion does not seem to be adequate
to yield the desired result, namely, to establish the identity of the person associated with that brain at a given time. The reason being that a given brain is only contingently related to the psychological constitution determining the identity of a given person. We can imagine that these psychological processes take place in some kind of chemical processes or some kind of electromagnetic field. And surely the identity of the chemical processes or the electromagnetic field is not dependent upon spatio-temporal continuity of the brain in question.

The fission and fusion cases discussed above are most instructive in our quest of knowledge of the self. We have seen that Parfit's claim of 'Survival without identity' works only if we think of the self in the image of the brain. That is, if we think of the self in the third-person perspective. But when we consider the self from the inside in the first-person perspective, the divisibility of brain does not correspond with the idea of self as a unique and unitary centre of consciousness. One finds it difficult or rather impossible to imagine oneself splitting into several selves each representing a separate point of view and yet all of them being one's
own point of view. On the other hand, the fact that the brain is the physical basis of the self and the carrier of one's point of view upon oneself and the world has to be reckoned with. As it is the case generally with mental concept our knowledge of the mind is received both in the first-person perspective and the third-person perspective. The theories of mind have tended to emphasize one at the expense of other. But these two perspectives seem to conflict. And for a proper understanding of a mental concept both these perspectives are relevant and need to be integrated. Can we achieve such an integration in case of our concept of the self? Well, philosophers have not succeeded in doing so, so far for the good reason that our understanding of what a thing is cannot be separated from its epistemology and the two perspectives produce two different epistemic points of view.

In the face of the above problem it might be suggested that we hold on to our naive conception of the self. In favour of this conception the strongest point is that it seems to be necessary to the conceptual framework which we do actually employ in day to day life in terms of which we think about ourselves and the world.
The naive conception is also supported by the apparent incoherence in the doctrine of 'survival without identity' This lands us into the standpoint of the third theory discussed in chapter V. This is the standpoint which McGinn advocates. As we have said this standpoint holds the concept of self to be a primitive concept. As such, since the body and self equation is ruled out, the primitive concept of the self denotes a simple mental substance (Though the self is not identical with the mind as advocated by Decartes since the self is the subject of mental attributes). This self is indivisible and not gradable in degrees. One does not at times have more of a self or less of a self. It is simply that one is a self or not a self. The important implication of this conception of the self for personal identity is that personal identity would consist simply and only in the continuity of a self through time. Or, in other words, A is the same person or self as B if and only if A is straightforwardly identical with B. This is so because the self being indivisible cannot be reduced to other attributes.

All the same, McGinn's advocacy of the naive concept seems to be somewhat a counsel of despair. There is no
doubt that in ordinary life we carry a peculiar feeling of continuity. Throughout our lives we experience changes in our physical and our mental states, sometimes radical changes. Yet we have the feeling of remaining constant throughout our changing biography. But does this peculiar feeling guarantee that we possess the self in the form of a simple substance? Given that in introspection that we do not observe such a self, we must look for logical reasons compelling us to believe in the existence of such a self. The inadequacy of the Mind & Body Theories is not sufficiently compelling to make us embrace the Substance Theory blindly as it were. What are then the compelling reasons if any?

It seems to me that the central reason given concerns our experience of our unity of mind. The self as we have seen by the integrating power of self-consciousness is supposed to explain how this unity is achieved. But does it? It seems obvious that self-consciousness does not produce a substantial unity of the past self with the present self. The unity of mind exists only in the present self-consciousness through memory which makes the past available to the present. But memory itself
is an occurrence in the present and also, as we have seen, it can be frequently incorrect and even washed away totally. The point I am making is that self-consciousness is itself an experience of unity of mind, it is not an outside agency to bring about unity between separate mental states. It therefore does not seem to imply the persistence of a simple self-substance. In other words, the stipulated role of self-consciousness in bringing about unity of mind seems to be doubtful. Furthermore, the notion of the self as a simple substance raises the problem of 'individuation' of selves. If each self is a simple mental substance devoid of any intrinsic property to mark its individuality, how are we to distinguish one self from the other? Since each self is unique, what accounts for its uniqueness? We have seen that the Mind Theory has failed to provide a mental criterion for the same. It might be said that the problem of individuation is to be distinguished from the problem of identity. In case of self the individuation can be achieved by reference to the body with which a self in question is supposed to be associated. But as we have seen this way of distinguishing self cannot always be successful. We have seen in applying the 'survival test' that bodies
can be exchanged by the selves and even one body may be inhabited by more than one self. Furthermore, if a self is necessarily dependent upon body for its identification then we seem to lose the right to call it a substance. This is because a substance is conceived to be independent. Finally, we might enquire what is, in the nature of things, responsible for stipulating the existence of a self at all. It seems to be the fact of self-consciousness in the form of, as noted earlier, a peculiar feeling of continuity. It is important to remember that self-consciousness does not represent a cognitive awareness of a thing called 'the self'. What then does it represent? One suggestion put forward by Prof. M.M. Agrawal is that self-consciousness is a peculiar blend of two separate consciousness: One in the form of being-consciousness and the other in the form of consciousness of 'separateness', i.e., consciousness of being a separate individual entity. The first, i.e., being-consciousness per se represents presence in the world without any limiting constraints while the consciousness of separateness represents the being of a particular individual as such and such. If this analysis of self-consciousness were correct it will weaken our
desire for the self in the form of a simple substance. But it seems to me that the two elements distinguished in our self-awareness are normally not empirically available to us separately. That is, we are not normally first aware of being-consciousness *per se* and then aware of a separate process of individuating it. In other words, our common experience does not guarantee the character of the blend in question. In face of this difficulty it remains a speculative position. But then we are not driven to take this position. Nothing in the facts of the case of self-awareness compells us to the above analysis. However, it is claimed that through meditation one is able to enter the state of being-consciousness excluding the state of I-consciousness. I personally have no access to such consciousness. But it must be acknowledged that in philosophy one cannot lose touch with the 'facts of the case', only that the facts invoked here are outside the domain of ordinary experience.

We have examined, what appears to me, to be the major contributions towards a philosophical understanding of the nature of the self. Unfortunately we have not found any of the associated doctrines compelling enough
to be accepted. Where do we go from here then? Must we have another theory? It seems to me that as our ordinary experience of selfhood is pretty constant, the theories we have discussed represent sufficiently exhaustive points of view on the self.

There is some truth in each of the above theories. In the Body Theory, for example, it is undeniably true that in ordinary life we identify others with their bodies. It is not that we see people as hidden entities in possession of their bodies. Even in our own case it is difficult, perhaps impossible to experience the self except in association with the body. Secondly, it is undeniable that the brain is the physical basis of consciousness and therefore of personality. By extension, it can be seen as the physical basis of self-consciousness as well, which as we have said, is necessary for human selfhood. And the brain obviously is a part of the body. Thus the physical locality of the self in the brain is an important fact to be accounted for in any theory of self. Similarly in the Mind Theory first of all, introspectively, as we have seen, we do not find a mental entity which we can call the self. And then the peculiar feeling
of identity over time seems to stretch between poles of memories. If attention is confined to the present moment exclusively we find absence of self-consciousness. Only the direct object of consciousness is present. This encourages the view that the self after all may only be a mental construct. In the Substance Theory we have seen that the fact of the unity of experience is considered very important. The unity of mind displayed in self-consciousness is of a different kind than the unity of properties displayed in physical object. It is the role of self-consciousness in bringing about the unity of mind that encourages us to go for the Substance Theory. But none of them is wholly satisfactory. Perhaps it is in the nature of things that inspite of thousands of years of enquiry into the nature of self we have not been able to grasp it adequately. Perhaps the self is the most magnificent mystery of life. Philosophy is an attempt to unravel the mysteries of life by means of thought. But as the sages have told us not everything can be known by thought. The self seems to be one of those things - a thing too near, yet too far. But then, life is like that.