CHAPTER-4

Attempts for Resolution

4.1 Resolution of the Problem of Identity

In the last chapter we have highlighted the main drawbacks of the Identity theory that have been pointed out by different critics working on this field. In the present chapter efforts will be made to resolve these problems from the materialistic point of view.

It is fact that in the seventeenth century the mind-body problem was introduced in a new face by the modern philosopher Rene Descartes and this theory reigned supreme for a long period of time. Side by side materialistic interpretation of the same was also there which attracted the scientific minded philosophers much. But now-a-days it can be said with great conviction that dualism, either of Descartes or any other form, is no longer acceptable and this downfall of dualism was expedited with the appearance of G. Ryle in the philosophical world. The present position of dualism is forlorn and the supporters of this theory are defensive. This point is very rightly manifests in the writing of D. Dennett when he says,

"The idea of mind as distinct in this way from the brain, composed not of ordinary matter but of some other, special kind of stuff, is dualism, and it is deservedly in disrepute today,............. Ever since Gilbert Ryle’s classic attack
(1949) on what he called ‘dogma of the ghost in the machine’ dualists have been on the defensive."

In the last chapter we have mentioned different problems of identity raised by some philosophers of which John Searle is prominent. The problems that Searle points out are thoroughly discussed in that chapter. His claim was that Identity theory violates the principle of logic. By this principle he means ‘Leibniz’s Law.’

But in response to this objection they hold that this objection is based on the ignorance about the details of the brain. When a person comes to know more and more about the brain, he will be able to attribute perfectly and comfortably the spatial location of mental states and at the same time to attribute the so called mental properties to the states of the brain. The identity theorist further says that in explaining the location of the pain in the toe the totality of the neuro-physiological aspect of having the pain should be taken into account. This experience comprises the stimulation of the peripheral nerve endings in the toe up to the brain itself. Searle thinks that the answer given by the identity theorist to the objection is a satisfactory one but there are more serious objections which they have to face.

Searle raises another objection that the identity theory sounds like property dualism.

But for the identity theorists the problem is a decisive one. The whole point of their theory is to save materialism. The central point of their theory is to show that mental states are really identical with the states of the brain, that is, mental states are reducible to material states of the brain. But if this theory admits that mental states are irreducible to brain states then the whole project of their theory fails and it will leave an irreducible mental element for us. In order to

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1 Daniel C. Dennett: (1991), *Consciousness Explained*, p-33
avoid such consequence the identity theorists propose that without using any mental predicates the phenomena in question can be specified. They can be specified in a topic-neutral vocabulary. In explaining this specified topic-neutral vocabulary they say that instead of saying that ‘there is a yellow-orange afterimage in me’ it is better to say that “there is something going on in me that is like what goes on when I see an orange”. Thus the second objection was supposed to be answered by rephrasing the identification of the mental state in a ‘topic-neutral vocabulary. This topic-neutral vocabulary enables us to specify the mental element in a non-mental, neutral vocabulary, e.g., ‘there is this thing going on in me’. This statement can be more specified in a neutral way without being committed to dualism or materialism. Here the thing in question is a brain process. Thus in consistent with materialism, mental features can be specified by us.

Searle is not satisfied with this answer. He says that the answer given by the identity theorists fail to convince the critics. To him, it is a fact that mental phenomena continue to have mental properties. This fact does not change when we talk about mental phenomena without using a mental vocabulary. In this connection he cites the example of yellow-orange after image and says that this image remains a qualitative and subjective one and does not depend on our choice to mention those features. One may refuse to talk about airplanes and can just say that there are some properties which belong to United Airplanes. But this refuse of airplanes in no way eliminates the existence of airplanes.

We should be focused on what exactly the identity theorist is proposing. He is not denying the existence of mental phenomena. What he suggests is to reject the dualistic framework, whether the Cartesian type or property dualism type. To insist upon irreducible mental entities or properties is a sign for a kind of spiritual quest that would never end. A more promising line of enquiry is the materliastic one and the dominant epistemological perspective should come from
third person perspective supplemented by the first person perspective. The stance
should not be that either this perspective or that.

The third objection comes from the accusation of 'neuronal chauvinism'.
This objection comes from a readiness to accept a stubborn dualism which the
identity theorist is painstakingly advocating to drop.

The strength of Kripke's arguments rests on the assumption that the
identity statement about mental state and brain state does not contain two rigid
designators. 'Gold' is a rigid designator; 'the yellow metal' is not a rigid
designator and 'the element with atomic number 79' is a rigid designator. Hence,
it is possible that there is gold without being the yellow metal where as it is
impossible for gold not to be the element with the atomic number 79. Gold being
the element with atomic number 79 is a scientific discovery. Now suppose that
the concepts 'mental state' and 'brain state' are well defined. Further assume that
we have a scientific breakthrough and the identity of mental state and brain state
is discovered. In that case it would be impossible for a mental state not to be a
brain state. Expressions expressing those would be now regarded as two rigid
designators.

4.1.1 Resolution of the Problem of Co-existence.

Regarding the problem of co-existence J. A. Shaffer mentions that the co-
existence is of two types: co-existence in time and co-existence in space and he
believes that the identity theory fails to convince us how the conditions of co-
existence in time and space can be met.

But in reply to the problem of co-existence it is believed by some
supporters of the identity theory that this objection can be met. They put forward
two approaches in this connection. The first approach of them is that this
objection of co-existence begs the question. It is paradoxical to ask that if mental
events and physical events are really identical then mental events must occur in
a location as the physical events occur and the location of mental events must be exactly in the same location where physical events occur.

Secondly, to reply the objection of co-existence, the identity theorists approach that it is the whole body where all the physical events occur and the occurrence takes place where the whole body is located. And the mental events also occur in the location where the body is located and in no way it is located in any particular part of the body. We think that the answer to the objection raised by Shaffer against the identity theory is satisfactory.

Shaffer declares the impossibility of identity theory on the alleged ground that by analytic necessity experiences are unlocated whereas neural events are located. These are located in part of the subject’s neural system. But David Lewis severely criticized this view and says that there is no strength in this argument. According to Lewis, it is metaphysical prejudice to believe the principle that as experiences are unlocated so these enjoy analytic or other necessity and as such this claim cannot be respected. He says that if there is a way in which experiences are, by analytic necessity, unlocated, then this way is also irrelevant. Because in a primary sense we regard only concreta as allocated somewhere and this is perhaps in our pre-systematic thought. Abstracta are said to be located only in a derivative sense. These are located in concreta by the relation of inherence. Thus Lewis says,

"But this possible source of analytic unlocatedness for experiences does not meet the needs of Shaffer’s argument. For neural events are abstracta too. Whatever unlocatedness occurs to experiences not because they are mental but
because they are abstract must occur as much as to neural events. So it does not discriminate between the two."

**2.1 Resolution of the Problem of Consciousness**

In explaining the problem of consciousness Chalmers holds the view that if one takes consciousness seriously; he will have to endorse a dualistic theory like property dualism. Because materialism fails to explain the question how consciousness could amount to physical structures and processes. He argues that consciousness is not seriously taken by the eliminativists also as they do not believe any phenomenon over and above brain processes and their interaction.

It is undoubtedly true that the problem of consciousness is really a problem. There are different ways through which this problem can be viewed. One such way is to think that it is an old mind-body problem with a new set of concepts to consider. In recent debate about consciousness there is a concept of *supervenience* and this concept can be understood on many levels although basically it describes a dependence relation between two sets of properties-higher level properties and lower level properties. If the higher level properties depend upon the lower level properties then it is said that higher level supervenience on the lower level. This concept of supervenience is very nicely explained by Chalmers which we have already explored while in discussing the problem of consciousness in the light of Chalmers. In rejecting the materialist theory of consciousness Chalmers exerted his best effort by giving different arguments. With the following two premises his argument can be summarised-

1. It is an empirical fact that in our world consciousness exists.

2. Consciousness cannot logically supervene on the physical because zombies are logically possible.

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Chalmers argues that zombies are logically possible. Zombies are logically possible or not is dependent on the belief that the notion of zombie has no inherent logical contradiction. Logically, only that has possibility which does not contain any logical contradiction in its nature. There seems to be no contradiction in the idea of a zombie who is physically identical with human being but lacking conscious experiences. This possibility is also admitted by the eliminativists. But unlike Chalmers, the eliminativists believe that zombies are not only possible but also actually existent like us. Dennett, an eliminativist, does not believe the existent of any phenomenon that match with consciousness even in human being like us. He does not agree with Chalmers’ view that an exact physical replica of a person exists but it is devoid of something that a person possesses. In this connection we may refer Dennett’s view which he expresses in his book “Consciousness Explained.” In chapter 12 of this book Dennett (1991) says-

“There is another way to address the possibility of zombies, and in some regards I think it is more satisfying. Are zombies possible? They are not just possible, they are actual. We are all zombies. Nobody is conscious- not in the systematically mysterious way that supports such doctrines as epiphenomenalism! I cannot prove that no such sort of consciousness exists. I also cannot prove that gremlins do not exist. The best I can do is show that there is no respectable motivation for believing in it.”

Dennett, in this passage, does not deny the pain experience. His view is rather that there is nothing mysterious in what is going on in our heads about which Chalmers was worried. Thus Dennett says-

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3. I, p-406
"The time has come to put the burden of proof squarely on those who persist in using the term. The philosophical sense of the term is simply ridiculous."\(^4\)

The argument which Dennett and other eliminativists put forward is that what is called by the philosophers as 'consciousness' is nothing more than a bunch of complex interaction between brain states, sensory input, and motor output that occur within our heads. This sort of things which Dennett claims and what Chalmers attributes to zombies are exactly same. But it is not a matter of fact whether a person is like a zombie or not, the materialists hold that there is an inconsistency in the logical possibility of zombies.

Dennett further says that it is totally inconceivable to have a zombie whose behaviour is exactly like us but does not possess any mental life. Searle points out that this strategy does not seem to be a very promising one on the ground that it is very easy to imagine intuitively that there is a machine which is in all respects likes us except consciousness. Dennett's argument is that someone may suppose the existence of iron bars and behaviour of this iron bars are exactly like magnets in all respects but yet not magnets. These are rather called zegnets. But an existence of zegnet, according to Dennett, is inconceivable because, this zegnet would be nothing but magnet. Thus Dennett analogically concludes that a machine whose behaviour in all respects is like a conscious agent is nothing but a conscious agent. Similarly, zegnets are nothing but magnets and zombies are nothing but conscious agents. Here philosophical intuition about the possibility or impossibility of zombies or similar sorts seems falter and the argument based on that cannot be considered as conclusive against the identity theory.

It is expected that the expansion of our knowledge of physics is possible in future and by this knowledge we will be able to see that consciousness does

\(^4\) Ibid., p-405
logically supervene on the physical, although Chalmers denied this possibility. This better understanding of physics will justify the standpoint of materialism but for which we will have to wait. Thus it can be said to Chalmers that to explain consciousness physically is to require a very different sort of physical theory than one that we have presently.

Chalmers' conclusion that consciousness cannot be explained physically is derived from the premises that zombies are logically possible and these zombies are physically identical with us except consciousness which they lack and that is why their inside is dark. He also claims that to infer the existence of consciousness in human beings one's knowledge of all physical information about a person is not enough. But the materialist suspects that Chalmers equates *explanation* with the bottom-up process of illustrating how high level properties are produced by low level properties.

It is a fact that in the debate between physicalist and dualist the notion of reduction is very important. There is sense in which some fact is reducible to other facts when the higher fact is explained by the lower facts and Chalmers uses the term *reduction* in this sense. From this conception Chalmers concludes that it is an impossible task to reduce consciousness to physical structure and their movements. But materialists claim that Chalmers' conclusion is partially true and partially false. Because there is another sense in which the term *reduction* is used and this is the sense which does not appeal to the notion of explanation. It rather appeals to how our world turns out.

It is true that the propounder of identity theory fails to explain consciousness. But it is also true that this is not blame only to identity theory but all theories whoever attempted to explain it. It is because of the fact that the problem of consciousness is one of the mysterious things in the world. There are several mysteries in this world, such as the mystery of the origin of the universe,
the mystery of the origin of life, the mystery of nature’s design, the mystery of
time and space and gravity. None can say the final answers about the question of
cosmology and particle of physics, molecular genetics and evolutionary theory.
Yet some of we know how to think about them. But this cannot be said about
consciousness. In this connection we may refer Dennett’s writing. He says,

“With consciousness, however, we are still in a terrible muddle. Consciousness stands alone today as a topic that often leaves even the most
sophisticated thinkers tongue-tied and confused. And, as with all the earlier
mysteries, there are many who insist-and hope-that there will never be a
demystification of consciousness.”^5

Chalmers notion was to establish dualism for which he criticized the
materialist theory. But there are possible responses from the materialist quarter
against Chalmers argument. These responses of the materialists undoubtedly
offer a viable alternative to property dualism. Not only this, these responses also
avoid the most counter-intuitive consequences of property dualism. The
materialists put forward the argument against zombie also. Acknowledging that
zombies are logically possible they hold that zombies are metaphysically
impossible. In this connection we may refer an illustration given by Joseph
Levine (1993) on the ground why the materialist should not be afraid of Chalmers
argument and give up their theory. Levine in his article “On Leaving Out What
It’s Like” (1993) points out that Chalmers argument that zombies are logically
possible is conceivable only and from this conceivable he establishes epistemic
conclusion without any attempt to establish metaphysical conclusions. Only from
the conceivability of zombies one yet not proves the real existence of zombies. It
can at best be imagined that zombies could exist. It is Levine’s claim that in order
to proceed from epistemic conclusion to the metaphysical conclusion an
additional step is required. And to refute materialism, this additional step is

^5 Ibid., p-22.
needed by an anti-physicalist. Thus by several questions Levine extends his objection against Chalmers refutation of materialism. Some of these are-

1. How does conceivability constrain how our universe really turns out?

2. We can conceive of a zombie, but why should this conceivability limit us to instantiate consciousness? Or, in other words, it may be that it cannot be conceived by someone how consciousness could be a physical phenomenon. But from this why should it mean that consciousness cannot be physical phenomenon?

Levine admits that at present we are unable to reduce consciousness to physical processes and this inability is stated by him as **explanatory gap**. But this explanatory gap, according to him, does not constrain how metaphysics of our universe will turn out.

It is conceivable, according to materialist that consciousness is not a physical phenomenon but the intention behind the application of metaphysical identity to consciousness is to show that metaphysically consciousness might be identical to physical phenomena. But dissatisfying with this argument of the materialist, Chalmers points out that this response explains the contingency and at the same time it avoids the conclusion that physically consciousness cannot be instantiated. The materialist theories hold that as there is identity between water and H₂O, so is the case between consciousness and physical processes. Logically it is possible or conceivable that water might have been XYZ but in fact in our world water is just H₂O. Therefore, water refers to H₂O in all possible worlds. In the same line of argument the materialists hold consciousness is physically instantiated although it is possible to think of a zombie having physical similarities with us but devoid of consciousness. From the above the materialists conclude that the physical phenomena should be called ‘consciousnesses’ in all
possible worlds. Thus, according to this revised version of materialism, metaphysically a zombie world is impossible although logically it is possible.

There is presumption that the materialists who believe the metaphysical identity also believe that in future there will be a conceptual revolution in physics and psychology and then we will be able to explain consciousness physically. They also believe that it will not be an impossible task for us to have a physical reduction of consciousness only after we got a true and complete theory of nature. Thus materialism cannot be refuted by Chalmers by the argument of the conceivability of zombies although we are lacking such expected revolution in physics. Moreover, the connection between consciousness and physical phenomena as *a priori* also cannot be admissible. We have our limitation in conceptual powers no doubt, but this limitation does not impose any further upon us to instantiate consciousness.

In the light of the above argument we may show a common analogy to explain the phenomenon of life. Even in hundreds years ago life were explained with the help of some miraculous vital spirit or such other substance. It was totally inconceivable to us to explain a complex phenomenon like life by the appeal to chemistry and minute particles. But now-a-day without appealing to any mysterious concepts such as, souls or vital fluid modern science is able to explain life and its reductive explanation. Thus it is the firm conviction of the materialists that a day will come when we will be able to do the same thing in respect of consciousness and the problem of consciousness will no longer be a 'hard problem' as Chalmers uttered. But if Chalmers preferred his own dualistic theory he must rule out the above response given by the materialists regarding the possibility of zombies. Here many philosophers would agree with us that the dualistic theory which he develops later must follow from the available evidence. But in order to prove that the notion of metaphysical identity of the materialist is unable to save themselves, Chalmers fails to provide a convincing argument.
That is why he fails to establish his claim that his own theory is a stronger alternative to materialism and thereby all his endeavours to rule out materialism ends in vain.

So far we have discussed the responses of the materialists against the criticisms of the identity theory and we have seen that the advocates of this theory very confidently met the objections raised. Now we will proceed to the concluding chapter of this dissertation.