CHAPTER – 5

CONCLUSION

In the last chapter we put forward different arguments that have been advanced by the materialist quarters in order to save the identity theory of mind. Now we are on the verge of the end of our dissertation where we will have to make our position clear.

We began our dissertation with a hope to find out the limitation and prospect of the identity theory. We are hopeful that from the discussion and analysis that are done so far, we will be able to say something about the future of the theory. Now let us review all that has been said and to put our opinion in this regard.

We have seen that Rene Descartes brought to our notice the problem of mind-body relation in modern period and made an interesting matter of discussion amongst philosophers. Prior to Descartes the problem was dealt by Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. But they could not attract others on this issue as Descartes did. Descartes made mind-body problem as central one in philosophy and generated an endless debate in philosophy of mind. The problem of mind-body rose out of the conceptions of mind and body- mind being non-spatial and immaterial while body is spatial and material. Critics of Descartes blamed him by saying that he left a lot of problems instead of solving it. It cannot be denied that the dualism of Descartes failed to solve the mind-body problem and he himself was aware of his failure.
We have discussed in our introductory chapter that Descartes' substance dualism was also against the fundamental laws of physics known as the Laws of Conservation of Matter and Energy. According to this theory, the total quantity of matter and energy in this universe is constant. It neither increases nor decreases. But Descartes believes that the spiritual or mental energy is not fixed by physics. Understanding this problem some of the substance dualists show their equanimity with the laws of physics. We have also seen that side by side of substance dualism, property dualism also attempts to solve the problem but their efforts also end in vain.

The failure of dualism encouraged some philosophers to solve the mind-body problem in monistic way. This monism is of two types – mentalistic and materialistic. But like dualism, the mentalistic monism also fails to solve the problem. Materialism is dominant since 20th century. This materialistic interpretation of mind-body relation is of different types. Among them Behaviourism was the earliest and influential theory in the 20th century. The earliest version of this theory about mind was that of behavioural dispositions. According to this theory, apart from the behaviour of the body there is nothing called mind. This behaviouristic explanation was also of different types, such as Methodological, Psychological and Logical.

Methodological behaviourism is a movement in psychology which tries to adopt the observational methods of natural sciences. Unlike the traditional definition of psychology, this theory defines psychology as a science of behaviour and thereby it brought a change in the definition of psychology.
Psychological behaviourism deals with the method of psychology and introduces a introspection as a method for scientific psychology. According to this type of behaviourism, consciousness is the subject matter of psychology and this consciousness can be studied only with the method of introspection.

The logical behaviourism is a philosophical theory criticising which the identity theory developed. The fore runners of logical behaviourism among others are – G. Ryle and L. Wittgenstein. This theory puts forward the view that mental statements can be translated into a set of hypothetical statements about dispositional behaviour. Here the term ‘disposition’ does not mean presently existing behaviour but a person’s actual and possible behaviour. Logical behaviourism deals with the meaning of mental terms or concepts within the sphere of philosophy. By mental states it means behavioural dispositions or tendencies.

Ryle develops logical behaviourism by criticising Descartes’ theory of dualism. In explaining mind Ryle uses the term behaviour, skills, tendencies, propensities, dispositions, inclinations etc. He rejects the thesis that mind is something occult, mysterious, other worldly, something private or spiritual.

L. Wittgenstein, another logical behaviourist also develops his theory by criticising Descartes’ dualism. Wittgenstein does not believe that mental states are there in the mind. For him, it is mental activities for which mind stands not for mental entities. He says that to understand the inner processes of a person outward criterion is needed.
But this behaviouristic theory could not stand for a long time. In the middle part of the 20th century many philosophers were active in criticising this theory and eventually this was rejected by them.

Prof. C.A. Mac says that a person’s mind or states of consciousness is a common phenomenon that cannot be denied. Analytical or logical behaviourism does not deal with this truth.

Moreover, Ryle’s analytical behaviourism fails to explain creative thought of a person, integral vision of things and artistic imagination which are known as higher processes of mind. His inability to explain these was due to the fact that he confined the sphere of mind to ability and behaviour only. For the evolving of higher process of mind, the integration of human personality is very much essential. Human life gets its meaning and significance by creativity and integration of personality which Ryle fails to include in his theory of mind.

In the 20th century linguistic philosopher Noam Chomsky attacked behaviourism. According to him, the behaviouristic claim that to study psychology is to study behaviour is a thesis that overlooks the core issue. It is as superfluous as to say that when someone studies physics, he actually studies meter reading. Thus against the behaviouristic attitude, Chomsky says that the subject matter of psychology is human mind and not behaviour. Behaviour is the manifestation of the truth that mind and its feature exist.

There is another difficulty that the behaviourism had to face. According to this theory, there is no causal connection between inner mental states and outward behaviour. This view goes against our common sense intuition also. In explaining mental states behaviourism
says that it consisted in nothing but behaviour and disposition to behave.

Thus behaviourism is considered as an implausible doctrine. During 1960s some philosophers advocated a new theory called physicalism or identity theory. Thus identity theory developed as a reaction to the behaviourism, particularly of logical behaviourism and it can be surely said that behaviourism is a precursor of identity theory.

In our dissertation we have discussed another form of materialistic interpretation of mind known as functionalism. According to this theory, mental states are functional states and there are inputs, outputs and causal relations between states- external and internal that should explain consciousness. This theory does not restrict mental states to the human biological system, such as the brain. On the contrary this theory believes that other non biological systems, such as a highly complicated computer also can exhibit the same kind of functional relationships as the human beings do and thereby they possess the same kind of mental states. This theory says that things with different physical makes up may share the same kind of mental states. The popular analogy is this. Mind is to brain as the software is to hardware of the computer.

Functionalism identifies all mental states with the role they play. It does not identify mental states with what they are made of. In explaining a particular mental state this theory says that it depends on the way it functions in the system and in no way it depends on its internal constitution. The identity of a mental state is determined by the causal relation to sensory stimulations, other mental states and behaviour. This theory believes that mental states are nothing but the
corresponding functional role, so these can be sufficiently explained without taking into account the underlying physical medium like brain neurons etc. to explain mental state. Functionalism holds that mental states are not limited to a particular medium and thereby these can be realised in multiple ways.

As a materialist monist functionalism asserts that everything is physical. Thus it is in one way a response to behaviourism and in another way a development on behaviourism. This theory also paved the way for empirical work in neuron physiology and cognitive science and all these we have discussed in our dissertation.

A thermostat, a carburettor or a clock is nothing but what causal function they perform. These are not defined by their physical structure. For example, a clock can be made out of gears and wheels or an hourglass with sand in it or quartz oscillators or any number of physical materials, but all these are not the defining feature of a clock. The feature by which a clock is defined is that it is any physical mechanism which is able to indicate time. With regard to carburettors and thermostats a similar remarks could be made. Similarly in explaining mental state, functionalism holds that these are like carburettors or thermostats or clocks. Mental states are defined by their functions and causal relations. These cannot be defined by their physical structure or by its mental essence as Cartesian believes. In explaining belief functionalism says that it is a state which stands in certain relation to input stimuli and also other mental states and consequently which causes external behaviour.
But in spite of all its merits such as demystifying mind, functionalism becomes unattractive by suggesting non-biological minds.

While criticising functionalism Searle says that there is no ground to suppose that symbol manipulating robots can understand or perform mental acts. It is absurd to think that such artificial beings could produce their own thoughts and have their own conscious experiences. A human being possesses personality, moral obligations of right and wrong, ability to know. But these cannot be thought of in a machine. Each human being is made an individual by his day-to-day stress level sickness, death, birth etc. these cannot reproduced in a machine.

There is an argument against functionalism which is known as “Chinese Room Objection” according to which a computational system fails to exhibit consciousness. There cannot artificial intelligence with the help of which a computational system can think for itself.

Another lacking of functionalism is that it fails to solve the problem of private experience and subjectivity because it describes consciousness in an impersonal manner. Thus functionalism fails to give us a complete picture of mind and consciousness.

Functionalism, although better than behaviourism, leaves many issues unanswered relating to the nature of human mind. Let us now examine the identity theory of mind and to see how far this theory is successful in solving the mind – body problem.

Identity theory is a materialistic theory and it has an important position in the history of philosophy. As a reaction to the failure of behaviourism, the theory appears in the philosophical domain. The
prominent philosophers who are proponent of this theory, among others, are Place, Smart, Feigl, Armstrong and Lewis.

Place believes that consciousness is a process in the brain. But he does not believe that description of our dreams, fantasies and sensation are about a process in our brain. He does not believe that statement about sensation and mental images are reducible or analysable into statement about behaviour. Similarly, statements about consciousness are not statements about brain processes.

Place holds that the proposition “consciousness is a brain process” is a general or universal proposition because refers to all states of consciousness.

In order to establish the proposition that consciousness and certain brain processes are identical, Place holds that it is necessary to show some other things. By this he means to say that a subject’s reports of introspective observation can be accounted for in terms of the reports about his brain processes.

Smart says that in future we may be able to explain everything in terms of physical arrangement but consciousness cannot be so explicable if consciousness is considered to be something nonphysical. He says that physical processes in the tissues, gland, nervous system and so forth would not be sufficient to describe fully the happenings of events that are going on in a man. In addition to these physical processes, there are states of consciousness, such as his visual, auditory and tactual sensations, his aches and pains are also necessary. But Smart does not admit that these are correlated with the brain processes because nothing can be correlated with itself. To say that these are
correlated with the brain processes is to say that these are something over and above the brain processes.

It is a firm conviction of Smart that sensations are to be understood in terms of brain processes. But the meaning of 'after-image' or 'ache' and brain process of specific kind, according to him, are not same. He says that even sensation statements are not translatable into statements about brain processes. Sensation statements are reports of a different kind of the brain. Ontologically considered, there is nothing called sensations over and above brain processes.

Smart developed the theory on the ideas of Place and Feigl. He maintains that the statement 'sensations are brain processes' is not a straight out a statement of a scientific hypothesis. It should be adopted on the principle of Occam's razor according to which, in explaining any phenomena we should make as few assumptions as possible. It also says that entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity. This Occam's razor is the basis for his preference of the mind-brain identity theory over and above dualistic theory of mind-body. This Occam's razor also plays an important role in Feigl's explanation of mind-body identity. Feigl in his theory out rightly rejects the nomological danglers as believed by the dualists. Because according to him, these nomological danglers have no place in a respectable ontology. He also rejected epiphenomenalism which is a species of dualism and favoured identity theory. He argues that both the designate of the mentalistic language and the description of the behaviouristic language are identical. Again, the designate of both these types of languages are identical with the designate of neuro-physiological language. But in his 1958 paper the description of the behaviouristic language was dropped. He specified in précised way those concepts that are found within the
mentalistic language and the designate of these concepts and the designate of certain events or processes in the brain are supposed to be identical.

In his theory Feigl argued that in present day psychology the word 'mental' covers the unconscious events and processes, intentional acts of perception, introspective awareness, expectation, thought, belief, doubt, desire, volition, resolution etc. in addition to the events and processes of direct experience, i.e., the raw feels. Feigl says that intentionality is to be analysed in terms of pure semantics and therefore it belongs to the category of the logical rather than psychological. To attempt a neurophysiological identification of this aspect of mind, according to Feigl, is to lead a category mistake. Considering the above condition he extends his conclusion about the identity theory. He says that the states of direct experience which the conscious human beings possess and the state which we ascribe to some of the higher animals are identical with certain aspects of the neural processes in those organisms.

Unlike interactionism Feigl says that the subjective states are not only subjective but inter-subjective. The pain experience of A is purely subjective or private to him. This experience of A cannot be directly experienced by any other person. Yet another person B may infer analogically A’s pain only by observing the behaviours of A, but does not have it. This position recognises the unique and exclusive status of the private ownerships of the subjective experience and at the same time makes the experience publicly knowable. The former admission is due to logical necessity while the latter admission recognises the epistemological possibility of knowing someone’s mental state. In a way, this position undermines the allegedly exclusive and special status
of the mental with regard to the metaphysical and epistemological nature of it.

In explaining identity theory Armstrong says that mental states and brain states are identical. But this identity, according to him, is contingent. Armstrong says that to speak of ‘brain’, ‘brain storm’, ‘brain washing’ and like is to speak about mind. He expects that common people will agree with this view but it is theological reason on which some people deny this fact. The correctness of the identity theory is justified by the support of psychologists like Hebb and other scientists.

Contrary to the dualist claim that mind is a mystery, Armstrong says that mind is ‘in’ the body and it is natural to say that mental processes are inner processes. He uses the word ‘in’ in the sense of spatial.

In explaining the identity theory Armstrong delineated some serious objections that might be raised by the critics and consequently he tried to meet them. After this he concludes that the statement ‘the mind is the brain’ is not certainly a logically necessary truth rather it is contingent truth.

Armstrong’s thinks that the meaningfulness of the statement ‘The mind is the brain’ is dependent on the fact that the meanings of both the words ‘mind’ and ‘brain’ can be explained in the ways the meaning of ‘The gene is the DNA molecule’ is explained. He is sure that in that case the word ‘brain’ will not create any trouble. But the problem is with the word ‘mind’. In a quasi-ostensive way it is possible to explain the meaning of the term ‘brain’. But in the case of ‘mind’ to attempt to give a verbal explanation or ostensive definition of the
meaning of the word is impossible. In that case we must depart from a physicalist viewpoint. This problem is a great one that the central–state theory is facing.

Armstrong says that in virtue of certain physical characteristics of an object we call it brain and it is found inside the skull of the people as a sort of certain physical object. But if we treat this physical object also as mind we must have to add some *further* characteristics to it by virtue of which it is so-called. Because, the meaning of the word 'brain' and the word 'mind' are not same. But the question remains as to what this further characteristics are that are not found in the brain.

Armstrong says that if we explain the nature of mind in the way that psychologists do then there will be no problem. Psychologists treat mind as an object upon which certain physical stimuli continually act and as a result of these stimuli certain behaviour manifest from him. In between stimulus and response mind causally mediates. But unlike psychologists the central state theory says that in between stimulus and response it is physical processes that exist in the central nervous system. Armstrong points out that it is science to discover the exact nature of mind or mental states. He agrees with the modern science supposition that the central nervous system or more crudely and inaccurately the brain performs the task of mediator between stimulus and response.

Referring to the viewpoints of Place and Smart, Armstrong says that these thinkers consider only the side of stimulus but not response. After considering their views Armstrong concludes that by mental states he means primarily the concept of a state of the person that brings
certain sort of behaviour. By this he does not mean that mind and behaviour are one and the same thing rather he says that mind is the cause of behaviour. Unlike behaviourist he identifies mind with the inner principle of behaviour.

In our dissertation we also narrated the views of Lewis who also contributed in favour of identity theory. According to Lewis, every experience is identical with some physical states. By physical states he means some neuro-chemical states. Thus he believes that the identity theory rests on stronger foundation.

Lewis says that both experience ascription and certain neural-state ascriptions refer to the same thing. They refer neural states which are also states of experiences. But these ascriptions are not used in the same sense in two cases. A state of experience ascriptions is connected with the latter by causal role and this property accidentally belongs to it while neural state ascription refers to a state by describing it in detail. Thus the version of identity theory does not imply that the truth about experiences is the truth about neural state nor vice versa.

Lewis expresses his disagreement with Shaffer on the possibility of identity theory. While Shaffer argues the impossibility of identity theory on the ground that by analytic necessity experiences are unlocated but neural events have location in subject's nervous system. Lewis says that this claim of Shaffer cannot be respected as because this claim is based on metaphysical prejudice.

According to Lewis experience itself and the person who has this experience are not identical. The former is the attribute of being in but the latter is. Thus Lewis concludes that as the definitive
characteristics of experience is played by physical states and processes so experience must be physical.

It is evident that Armstrong and Lewis began their arguments with a claim about the meanings of mental terms. But it reveals that their 'common sense causal' version of the identity theory basically reiterates what is stated by Place and Smart in their original theory. They were defending the same position and therefore basically they present the same thesis. The following are the points on which they agree.

1. Individual’s private experiences or sensations are metaphysically reducible to certain unspecified events or processes in the brain.
2. All of them believe that the identity thesis is not a logically necessary truth and as such it is a contingent proposition. Here an individual’s description of his private experience and a physiologist’s description of the hypothetical brain processes do not have the same meaning.
3. All of them claim that the truth of the identity thesis, at least in its parts, can be determined empirically.
4. Place claims that there are certain aspects of mental life such as consciousness to which the identity thesis can be applied. This aspect of mental life is called by Feigl the raw feels of experience. Smart says that it is sensation to which identity thesis applies. All of them agree that there are aspects of mental life such as cognitive or volitional aspects which cannot be reduced to brain states or processes but these can be reduced to some kind of semantic, logical or verbal competence or propensity.
It is to be mentioned here that sometimes a distinction is made between type identity and token identity and this difference is implicit in various mind-brain identity thesis. This difference is mentioned by Nagel in a beautiful manner when he distinguishes between ‘general’ and ‘particular’ identities in the context of mind-body problem. Subsequently different philosophers also commented on this issue. The distinction is based on the point that whenever it is said that mental states and physical states are identical, does it mean that this statement is applied to concrete particulars, i.e., individual instances of pain that occurs in particular subject at a particular time? Or, does the statement apply to the kind under which such concrete particulars fall?

Token identity theory says that a particular mental state is identical with some physical state. But type identity theory says that mental states themselves are physical states.

But in between these two forms of identity we think that it is type identity which has sufficient ground to be acceptable than that of the token identity theory. Because the former deals with general problem while the latter with particular event. This point is very reasonably cited by Fodor (1974) when he says that type identity entails token identity but not vice versa.

Type identity theory claims that mental states, such as ‘pain’ is identical with physical states such as c-fibre excitation. Identity, according to this theory, is contingent and theoretically mental states are reducible to physical states.

It is true that there are drawbacks of type identity theory. But type identity theory is more acceptable than token identity.

From the discussion in our dissertation it is clear that the logical behaviourism fails to explain many things which were successfully done by the identity theory. It is also true that there are objections
against identity theory but most of the objections are rest on improper understanding the theory and the mental concepts. We are yet not fully aware of all the functions of the brain. When we will be able to acquire more knowledge about the happenings of the brain, we will be able to have spatial location of mental states and similarly to attribute the so-called mental properties to the states of the brain.

Thus considering all these we can conclude that among the theories on mind-body relation so far we have, it is identity theory which seems to be more successful one in explaining mind. Identity theory is better than any other theories mainly for two reasons. These are,

1. This theory provides a straight forward solution to the mind-body problem. As mental events are neurological events and nothing more, so there is no problem to understand the causal relations holding between mental events and material events and vice versa; it is nothing but neurological events causing one another, and

2. Although both identity theory and dualism grant the existence of brain and neurological activities but it is due to *parsimony* that the identity theory is acceptable. In addition to brain and neurological going-on the dualism supposes that there are minds and mental activities going-on. The identity theory claims that if it is possible to account for the mental phenomena solely by reference to brains and their properties then why should we posit additional items like mind and mental properties existing independently?

Contrary to behaviourism the identity theory asserts that at least some mental states and events are genuinely inner and genuinely episodic after all. These mental states and events are not identical with outward behaviour or even with hypothetical disposition to behave.
Moreover contrary to dualism this theory holds that episodic mental items are neither ghostly nor non-physical. They are rather neurophysiological. Mental states and events, according to this theory, are identical with states and events that occur in the central nervous system. More precisely it can be said that mental states and events and neurophysiological states and events are numerically identical. By saying this identity theory could accommodate brilliantly the inner and the episodic which behaviourism fails to do. Moreover, this theory shares the advantage of behaviourism in avoiding the objections to dualism and doing so it offers a spirit of scientific speculation.

In the philosophy of mind dualism is right when it holds that mental items are inner and episodic but it is wrong when states that mental items are non-physical in nature. Similarly, behaviourism is right in its materialism but wrong when this theory repudiates inner mental episodes. Thus here identity theory is delightful synthesis of both dualism and behaviourism.

Hence considering all these factors there are sufficient grounds to conclude that in spite of certain limitations the identity theory has a bright prospect as this theory attempts to explain the nature of mind scientifically.