Preface

The Dissertation we are going to submit for examination is for the degree of Ph.D. This work is entitled, The Identity Theory of Mind: Limits and Prospects. In this dissertation, we discuss the views of some prominent philosophers who worked in this field.

It cannot be denied that Mind-Body problem is undoubtedly regarded as one of the perplexing problems in philosophy. It can be correctly said that this problem is a world knot that remains unresolved although efforts have been going on to have a generally accepted solution to this problem. Right from ancient Greek period there are different theories such as interactionism, behaviourism, Identity Theory, Functionalism etc. prevalent in philosophical literature. None of the theories can claim that it has solved the problem perfectly. But among these theories, we think, it is the Identity Theory that looks more promising to resolve the problem than the other theories do.

The research work we submit is divided into five different chapters. There are also sub chapters in some of the chapters. The first chapter is introductory chapter which contains three sections. In the first section we discuss the historical antecedents of the Identity theory. In modern period, the mind-body issue was brought to our notice by Descartes. He tried to solve the problem from dualistic point of view. But he created an endless debate on this issue. Critics have pointed out that Descartes left us with a number of problems instead of solving the
problem. There are several problems in his theory but the most vital problem is to find out the exact relation between the mental and the physical. Thus finding drawbacks of his dualistic theory the materialist philosophers rejected it and tried to solve the problem from monistic standpoint. This materialist theory of mind is of two types, viz., Behaviourism and Identity Theory. In this section we briefly discuss Behaviourism because in section 1 of the 2nd chapter we discuss this theory elaborately.

In the 2nd section of the 1st chapter we discuss the nature of Identity theory. This theory appeared as a reaction to the failure of Behaviourism. A number of philosophers beginning from psychologist E.G. Boring developed this theory. Boring developed this theory in 1930, but got its recognition after a long period of time by the leading philosophers like U. T. Place, Herbert Feigl and J. J. C. Smart. They are the earliest advocates of this theory. All of these philosophers put forward their versions in the late fifties to sixties. D. Armstrong, H. Putnam and David Lewis are the subsequent prominent philosophers who developed this theory further. In addition to them other thinkers also contributed to this theory. The theory is also called ‘Type Physicalism’, ‘Mind-Brain Identity Theory’ and ‘Type-Identity Theory’. Pioneering papers such as “is consciousness a Brain Process?” by U.T. Place in 1956, H. Feigl’s ‘The “Mental” and the “physical”’ in 1958 and J. J. C. Smart’s “Sensations and Brain Processes” in 1959 made this theory the focus of the philosophical discussion.

According to the Identity Theory of Mind, certain physical states of brain are identical to mental states. In other words, this theory holds that the so-called mental phenomena like thoughts, feelings, wishes and the rest are identical with the bodily states and processes. Thus to have
some specific kind of thought is to have some kind of specific states and processes of bodily cells, typically brain cells. When we say that someone is in a certain mental state, it implies that in the cerebral cortex of the brain of that person, certain physical event is going on. The person concerned may not be aware of the happenings of the brain but these two states are not merely correlated with each other rather these two are one and the same event in the literal sense. Thus this theory asserts that everything mental is physical. Although it speaks of mental states it does not assert that these are not physical.

In the third section of this chapter, we discuss the different types of Identity theory, viz., Type Identity and Token Identity theory. According to token identity theory, every concrete particular that falls under a mental kind can be identified with some physical happenings. In this connection this theory identifies an instance of pain which is an instance of mental state with an instance of physical state (say, C-fibre excitation). Type identity theory, on the other hand, holds that mental kinds themselves are physical kinds and in that sense, token identity is weaker than type identity.

In the second chapter, we elaborately discuss traditional paradigms of Identity theory. Here we discuss Behaviourism and functionalism in details and differentiate these theories from that of Identity theory. Behaviourism is the theory that defines consciousness in terms of bodily behaviour observable to others. This theory denies outright any independent significance of mind and believes that behaviour is out and out determined by the environment. Behaviourism is of different types. But it is logical behaviourism criticising which Identity theory developed. Logical behaviourism was mainly advocated by G. Ryle and Wittgenstein. In explaining the nature of the mind Ryle
says that mind is composed of sensations, feeling and image. These are the stuff of mind. To talk about mind or consciousness as some world behind or beyond the activities is a mistake. The meaningful reference to mind is a description of how people behave in certain given situations.

Ryle’s theory of analytical behaviourism fails to explain higher process of mind like creative thinking, integral vision of things and artistic imagination because he confined the sphere of mind to abilities and behaviour. The integration of human personality is very much essential for evolving higher process of mind. Creativity and integration give meaning and significance to human life. But Ryle fails to include these in his theory of mind.

Another materialist theory known as Functionalism also attempted to solve mind-body problem. According to this theory, all mental states are identified by the role they play in the mental system; they are not identified with what they are made of. Particular type of mental states like thought, desire, pain etc. do not depend for its identity on its internal constitution, it is dependent on the way it functions or on the role it plays in the cognitive system of which it is a part. The causal relations to sensory stimulations, other mental states and behaviour determine the identity of a mental state. But still there is lacking in this theory as it fails to mitigate the problem of privacy of experience and subjectivity.

In the third chapter, we have highlighted different problems of Identity theory such as the problem of identity, the problem of co-existence and the problem of consciousness. In the fourth chapter these problems are addressed. The fifth chapter is the concluding chapter where we conclude that among the different theories on mind it is
identity theory, which is more acceptable than the others; because, this theory provides a comparatively reasonable answer to the mind-body problem. This theory shares the advantage of behaviourism in avoiding the objections to dualism and doing so it offers a spirit of scientific speculation.

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