



THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM AND THE IDENTITY THEORY

Dr. Sudipta Goswami

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Author Details: Assistant Professor,
Department-Philosophy,
Balarampur College, Purulia,
West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author: Dr. Sudipta
Goswami

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Abstract

The paper aims to discuss, the famous mind body problem which is concerned with the gap between mind and life or body. The mind and the body are completely different from each other though they are closely related to one other. The mind body problem is concerned with this relation between two completely different things. In other words, this problem is concerned with the question how does mental state and subjects relate to the physical world. Different Philosophers have given different solutions to this problem. The work will discuss the solution given by the Identity theorists. According to the Identity Theorists not necessarily but, as a matter of fact, every mental state is identical with some physical or neurochemical state. This theory states that mental states have the same reference as certain neural states: both alike refer to the neural states. But it does not say that mental states and physical states have the same sense. The Identity theory does not imply that whatever is true of mental states is likewise true of neural or physical states as such. These mental states are identical with states of the brain or the states of the brain or the states occurring in the owner's central nervous system. But this theory also has some difficulties too as the sense or meaning of talk about mental states and talk about brain states are different, brain states can't have semantic properties, the mental states can be true or false, but truth or falsity cannot be the property of brain states, every mental state has their own 'qualia', and the most important objection raised by the famous Functionalist Hilary Putnum was that this theory is applicable only to human beings, and it denies the possibility of other beings experiencing mental states. Surely, creatures with different types of neural organization might nonetheless be capable of experiencing pain of exactly the same type. But, last of all it can ended as the theory made a good attempt to solve the famous mind-body problem.

Keywords: *Mind-Body Problem, Gap, Identity, Mental states, Neurochemical states, Sense, Truth or Falsity, Qualia, Humam Beings*

In the historical succession, mind follows upon life. Just as life did not occur on our planet until inorganic matter assumed forms of great complexity, so mind did not arise until organic matter had reached a still further degree of complexity, involving sense-organs, nerves and brains.

It is often said that within the realm of the empirical we find three levels': matter, life and mind. Living things, though remarkably different from non-living things, are still material or physical things: they are composed of matter. But now do we come to something that, in the opinion of most philosophers at least, is not material at all: the organic bodies which are apparently necessary conditions for the occurrence of minds are material, but minds themselves are not. If this is so, we have a wider "gap" between life and mind, than we had between organic matter and life.

The famous mind-body problem is concerned with this gap between mind and life or body. The mind and the body are completely different from each-other though they are deeply related with each-other. The mind-body problem is concerned with this relation between two completely different things. In other words, this problem is concerned with the question that how mental states and subjects relate to the physical world. Can mental phenomena exist independently of physical phenomena, or they depend upon them for their existence? If physical states do indeed give rise to mental states, how can this occur, since the mental and physical seem so very different from each-other?

Actually, mind-body problem is a very critical and also an important problem. This problem is concerned with the question namely that, how do mental states relate to physical states or states of the brain. This question has perturbed philosophers for ages. Our mental states and our physical states are contradictory objects. Mental states have consciousness, which can never be the attribute of physical states. On the other hand, our physical states (of the brain) have extension, which again, can't be the attribute of mental states. But in spite of this differences, we have to admit that there is a necessary connection between the mental states and the physical states. The question then arises, how do this opposite state relate to each-other.

To be more specific, it can be said that, the perplexity about the mind-body relation stems from the fact that mental states have two distinctive properties that are difficult to fit into the prevailing views about the nature of physical world. These two main properties of the mental states are (1) the qualitative nature or character of the mental states. According to the philosophers, each sensation has a qualitative distinctive feel. This characteristic of sensation has led philosophers to invent a special technical expression to describe sensations as possessing 'qualia' or 'raw feel'. 'Qualia' is the most important attribute of any mental state, but it has no connection with the physical states of the brain. (2) Another distinctive feature of mental states is their aboutness or the intentional nature. These two characteristics of the mental states are not possessed by the physical states. Yet the mental states and the physical states seem to be intimately related to each-other. So, the problem which is called the mind-body problem is that how are these two states or rather the mind and the body related to each-other.

Modern philosophers of mind are almost exclusively concerned with the mind-body problem: how meaning (intentionally) rationality and conscious experience are related to or arise from a material world which is in itself devoid of such characteristics. Here some discussions have been made about this mind-body problem and the solutions to this problem as given by the different philosophers, like the Dualists, the Behaviourists, the Functionalists and the Identity Theorists etc.

In this work I have discussed about the solution of mind-body problem that has been given by the identity theorists and also the discussions have been made about some difficulties which has been raised by different famous philosophers.

The Identity Theory

The Identity Theory is also known as the central-state theory. The theory of Philosophy of Mind claims that mind is a part of physical body and states and processes of mind is identical to the states and processes of the brain. Identity theorists often believe themselves as materialists. They also believe that physics is the foundational science. They claim that brain is reducible to its neurons and mind is reducible to brain.

Some famous Philosophers like U. T. Place, Herbert Feigl and J. J. C. Smart advocated the theory at the earliest. They proposed their views in the late 1950s to the early 60s. But Dvid Armstrong was the person who made this theory remarkable. He radically claimed that all mental states (including intentional one) are identical with physical states.

The Identity Theory is the hypothesis that says, not necessarily but, as a matter of fact, every mental state is identical with some physical or neurochemical state. This theory states that mental states have the same reference as certain neural states: both alike refer to the neural states. But it does not say that mental states and physical states have the same sense. The Identity theory does not imply that whatever is true of mental states is likewise true of neural or physical states as such. Contrary to the Behaviourists, these philosophers admit that same mental states are genuinely inner and are not to be identified with outward behaviour, even disposition to behave. Again, contrary to the Dualists, these mental items, according to the Identity theorists, are neither ghostly nor non-physical, in fact, they are neurophysiological. These mental states are identical with states of the brain or the states of the brain or the states occurring in the owner's central nervous system.

The main logic behind this theory was that- "a physical phenomenon can be translated in the language of another physical phenomenon, if both the physical phenomena are identical". This can be explained by the help of an example. We can translate 'water' in terms of 'H₂O', because, 'water' is identical with 'H₂O'. Like that, if we can translate a mental state in terms of physical state, then we can positively say that the mental state is identical with the brain state. As a matter of fact, we can say that it is already proved that every mental state has its corresponding brain state. For example, corresponding to the mental state, namely, pain, there is a brain state C-fibre firing in the central nervous system. Thus, we can translate 'pain' in terms of C-fibre firing. And if we can do this then, we can say that pain, which is a mental state, is identical with C-fibre firing, which is a brain state. Hence, in this way the Identity theorists proved that mental states are identical with brain states and so, mind and mental states have their own existence. The inspiration for this theory is the way in which science expresses many of its discoveries in terms of identity. Just as science tells us that lightning is an electrical discharge, temperature is mean molecular kinetic energy, so too the identity theorists tell us that to be in pain is to have C-fibre firing in the central nervous system. Thus, we have one phenomenon describable in both the language of neuroscience and the language of psychology.

There are two schools of identity theory, namely, (1) Type-Type Identity Theory and (2) Token-Token Identity Theory.

The strength of Identity theory lies in this that, it is a much simpler theory as compared to both Dualism and Behaviourism. By making the 'mental' entirely 'physical', the Identity theorists shared the advantage of avoiding the objections raised against Dualism with the Behaviourists and at the same time accommodating the mental states as inner states which can cause behaviour. Beside this, the Identity theory proved the interaction between the mind and the body, which no other theory had done. In fact, this theory proved that, the mind and the body are correlated, and thus any change in the brain states always brings a change in the mental states. Last of all, the Identity theorists have proved that the brain size determines the intellectual abilities or mental richness.

The Type-Type Identity theory claims that each type of mental state is identical with a given type of brain state. So, for example, every time anyone, anywhere, has a pain, his brain will be in a particular type of physical state, just as whenever and wherever someone encounters the type of stuff called water, he will also be encountering the type of stuff, called H₂O. Which type of brain state will turn out to be identical with being in pain cannot be specified in advance, but will need to be discovered empirically by observing the brain states of people who are in pain. If a one-to-one correlation between being in pain and the existence of a given type of brain state is found in all observed cases, the advocates of mind-body Identity theory would argue that the best explanation of the correlation would be that there is identity between the correlated items.

The Type-Type Identity theorists argue that mental properties could be reducible to physical properties, provided that an exceptionless set of correlations between a given type of mental state and a given type of brain state is forthcoming. It will then be reasonable to conclude that the painfulness of a pain, for example, is identical with the behaviour of certain sorts of neuron in the central nervous system, even though talk about pains is not equivalent in meaning to talk about behaviour of neurons. Thus, the Type-Type Identity Theory is a reductionist theory.

On the other hand, the Token-Token Identity Theory argues that a particular mental state is identical with a particular brain state. Here 'token' means 'a particular instance'. This theory is a criticism of Type-Type Identity Theory. The Type-Type Identity Theory is a straight forward reductionist account while the Token-Token Identity Theory claims to be non-reductionist.

Difficulties of Identity Theory

A number of serious difficulties are present in the Identity theory. They are as follows:

- First, the sense or meaning of talk about mental states and talk about brain states are different, thus they cannot be the same. According to the Identity theorists, however, their references are the same and thus can be identical.
- Secondly, we can have knowledge about our mental states, without having knowledge about the brain states.
- According to Identity theorists, the identity of any two objects does not depend on our recognition. So, they could be identical without recognizing them to be so.
- Thirdly, we can ascribe some properties upon mental states, which can't be ascribed upon brain states and vice versa- whereas mental states can't have spatial locations. Brain states can't have semantic properties. The Identity theorists may reply here that the identity holds good. For in this case what matters is the inferential role the item plays- hence brain states could have propositional content, just as mental state's anatomical locations.
- Fourthly, the mental states can be true or false, but truth or falsity cannot be the property of brain states, thus they are not identical. Saul Kripke in his "Naming and Necessity" points out that the identity spoken of by the Identity theory should be necessary identity and not a contingent one as argued by the Identity theorists. According to the Identity theorists, truth or falsity are the semantic properties of only mental states. These are not applicable to the brain states. Thus, this objection also cannot be accepted.
- The fifth objection is regarding 'qualia'. 'Qualia' means 'qualitative feel'. Every mental state has their own 'qualia'. Frank Jackson raised this objection, by the help of an analogy, namely 'Mary does not know', in his paper- "Epiphenomenal Qualia". This objection may be stated as follows: Identity theory like all other materialistic theories cannot explain the 'qualia' or the intrinsic qualitative nature of experience. Frank Jackson developed this objection by the help of an example. As he illustrates, a neuroscientist, 'Mary' who lives in a completely isolated, black and white environment, knows everything about the brain and the central nervous system, but does not know anything about a certain phenomenal experience, viz, colour. One day she finds herself in a colourful world, and has different kinds of visual and auditory sensations of which she had to know before. All that she knew before were the brain states and the neural correlations but, she had no idea about the "raw feel" or the qualitative nature of those mental states. Frank Jackson claims that if mental states and brain states were identical, then Mary would have known about the qualitative states. Thus, even though Mary knew everything about the brain and the central nervous system, she did not know anything about the mental states. Thus, brain states and mental states cannot be identical.
- Paul, Churchland³, in support of this theory offers an argument. There are two levels of knowledge in this supposition. (1) Mary lives in a black and white world, though she knows everything about the neural correlations and brain states, (2) when she becomes acquainted with the colourful world, she becomes acquainted with the qualitative nature of the experience of which she had no knowledge before, According to Churchland, both the levels were same, the only difference was that, in the first level, Mary knew everything what it is to know about the neural correlates in the brain.

But in the second level, she did not know anything about the intrinsic qualitative nature of the experience. Thus, this can be said that, Mary knew all about the neuro-physiological states of the experience., although she did not have any knowledge about the nature of the phenomenal states.

- The last and the final objection raised against the Identity theory was it is “Species Chauvinistic”. The famous functionalist Hilary Putnam raised this objection in his paper ‘The Nature of Mental States’. According to Putnam, the Type-Type Identity Theory is species chauvinistic in in that it denies the possibility of variable relations i.e., to say this theory is applicable only to human beings, and it denies the possibility of other beings experiencing mental states. Surely, creatures with different types of neural organization might nonetheless be capable of experiencing pain of exactly the same type.

Thus, it can be concluded that though the theory has many difficulties, but it made a significant attempt to solve the famous mind-body problem and for this reason the famous Identity Theory is really valuable for us.

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