THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM AND IQBAL'S POINT OF VIEW

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I

The problem of mind-body relationship has been a source of trouble and confusion in the history of philosophy. Right from Aristotle to date philosophers and scientists have been trying to account for the apparent interaction of two fundamentally different but mysteriously united phenomena, i.e. body and mind. We can find no satisfactory explanation of the matter either in Materialism or in Idealism or in Mentalism.

The problem first appeared in Plato who had made a complete dichotomy between the world of Ideas and the world of Becoming. He was aware of the inherent inconsistency of his system and, to over-come it, he had introduced the idea of God by which he tried to explain the interaction between Form and Matter in general. But it was not at all satisfactory, and Aristotle's whole metaphysics was essentially an attempt to overcome the dualism of Form and Matter.

The problem continued to occupy the mind of the Scholastics, but we find no significant attempt to resolve it. The problem appears with all its dimensions and difficulties in Descartes and his successors. Descartes, who is usually regarded as the father of modern philosophy, in his endeavour to find certain and durable foundation for philosophy, drew certain conclusions from the so-called axiomatic principles which led him to utter dualism of body and mind, and all his attempts eventually failed to account for the

interaction of the two. A brief review of Descartes' position will help us understand the problem with its various dimensions.

For Descartes, the definition of substance as presented by the Scholastics is a self-evident idea since it bears two marks: clarity and distinctness. "Substance is that which is in itself and needs nothing other than itself in order to exist" is the Scholastic definition which Descartes accepted as an axiomatic truth. He believed in complete mechanism and determinism in the realm of matter, but at the same time he had an equal degree of belief in the freedom of soul or mind. Thus he was led to postulate the theory of "two substances," body and mind. Extension constitutes the essence of all material things, whereas thought is the most fundamental and essential attribute of mind. In the realm of extension there is complete mechanism. Even human body is like a machine whose movements are predetermined. Soul or mind, however, is a distinct substance whose characteristics are fundamentally opposed to those of extension. Thus the common-sense view of body and mind found philosophic expression in Descartes. But this dualism becomes terribly baffling when he tries to explain human personality in which mind and body are so intricately and mysteriously united that a deep and subtle interaction between the two cannot be denied. A mere idea or a desire can lead the body to strenuous activity. Similarly, physiological changes, or, what Descartes would call, material phenomena, can have their impact on the mind, for example, an accident or the smell of chlorophorm can result in the loss of consciousness. We cannot say that body is real and mind is derivative or vice versa. Both are equally real and independent sub-stances. They are fundamentally different. Yet they interact and influence each other. Descartes tried to account for the interaction between the two by referring to the "pineal gland" as the point of contact, but its inadequacy was evident, and he himself finally confessed in a letter to Queen Elizabeth that he had failed to solve the problem.

The inadequacy of the theory of interactionism led the subsequent thinkers to different theories regarding mind-body relationship. Arnold

Geulinx gave the theory of "two clocks" or parallelism according to which mind and body do not interact at all, yet they correspond to each other. They are analogous to two synchronized clocks. The tick of one corresponds to the tick of the other without there being any causal relationship. An event in the mind, say, my will to raise the arm, would correspond to an event in the body, i.e. the physical act of raising my arm, since the "two clocks" keep absolutely perfect time. God has so perfectly wound up both the clocks that the tick of one provides an occasion for the tick of the other to take place. This theory is also known as Occasionalism. Russell raises a very serious objection to it:

"…There were of course serious difficulties in this theory. In the first place it was very odd; in the second place, since the physical series was rigidly determined by natural laws, the mental series, which ran parallel to it, must be equally deterministic. If the theory was valid there should be a sort of possible 'dictionary,' in which each cerebral occurrence would be translated into the corresponding mental occurrence. An ideal calculator could calculate the cerebral occurrence by laws of dynamics, and infer the concomitant mental occurrence by means of the 'dictionary'. Even without the dictionary, the calculator could infer words and actions, since these are bodily movements."[63]

There is another theory which is known as Double-Aspect, or Identity Theory, the chief advocates of which are Spinoza and Kant for whom ultimate or basal reality is neither physical nor psychical. Both the physical series and the psychical series derive from this reality and are causally connected. The members of the movement of New Realism also subscribe to this theory. They hold that the physical and the psychical can be reduced to neutral entities. This is why their doctrine is sometimes called Neutral

[63] B. Russell, History of Western Philosophy (London : George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1969), pp. 545-46.

Monism or Neutral Realism.[64] A little reflection would reveal that this theory is only a disguised form of occasionalism and suffers from the same defect as has been pointed out by Russell. The physical series is subject to certain rigid natural laws and is to be explained mechanically, whereas mind has no spatial reference and is capable of shaping the future events. Moreover, this theory uses the hypothesis of an unknown or an unknowable to explain the mind-body relationship.

In the history of thought, we come across certain theories in which the problem is approached in rather another way. The fundamental procedure of such theories is to eliminate one of the offending parties and ascribe reality and primacy to the other. These theories are some-times called Epiphenomenalism and Psychic Monism. According to Epiphenomenalism, the mind does not exist on its own account as an independent substance. It is just an outgrowth of material processes. "The one real substance is matter. The stream of consciousness is a phenomenon accompanying certain neurological changes. What we have called mind is a glow or shadow that appears under some conditions ; certain processes taking place in the brain and nervous system produce sensations, feelings, emotions, imagery, thought, or other types of consciousness."[65] In almost all types of Materialism mind is regarded as an epiphenomenon or an outgrowth of matter. Thus we find in Dialectical Materialism that Marx and Engels ascribed primacy and reality to matter. Mind for them is a qualitative change which arises from quantitative changes. Despite its seemingly in-corporeal character, it is rooted in matter.

A similar attempt is made in various forms of mentalism or spiritualism to get rid of matter instead of mind. Now, mind is regarded as primary and fundamental and matter as of secondary importance. "Psychical monism is the view that the causal series is con-fined to the mental and that what we

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[64] Titus, Living Issues in Philosophy (New York : American Book Company, 1959), p. 174.
[65] Ibid., p. 175.

call matter is a shadow cast by thought. Matter is essentially an appearance. The body is an externalization of mind. All idealists insist on the permanent significance and reality of mind. They do not all claim that the body or the physical is mere appearance—that is, not all idealists are psychical monists—but psychical monism in some form is supported by the idealists such as Lotze, Fechner, Eduard van Hartmann, W.K. Clifford, Friedrich Paulsen and C.A. Strong."[66]

We can very easily see that both types of theories commit the same mistake, i.e. asserting the reality of one and explaining away the other. If one believes with the materialists that matter is the only reality and mind is just a projection of it, then one has to include the attributes peculiar to matter in-one's conception of mind. Similarly, if one believes that mind is everything and body just its externalisation, then one should also believe that matter is conscious. Marx and Engels, while arguing against Hegel's idealism, had thought that they were busy "setting him on his feet". The same type of remark can be directed to them by an idealist with equal force. The fact is that these types of theories—the denial of matter or the denial of mind—give no solution to the problem.

A widely popular solution to the problem is provided by the theory of Emergent Evolution. In his famous book Emergent Evolution, C. Lloyd Morgan has tried to establish that-life is an elaborate "regrouping of physiochemical elements". He criticizes both mechanism and vitalism. Mechanism, according to him, cannot explain the creative aspect so peculiar to the evolutionary process of Nature. The claim of vitalism that life-principle is the only determining factor in the process of evolution is also not justified because creativity and the emergence of new qualities are commonly found in the development of matter. Morgen believed in various levels or stages of the process of evolution in which matter and mind are just two levels. Both are equally real and there is no essential dualism. Mind, however,

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[66] Ibid., p. 176.

is a distinct and higher level where certain new qualities emerge which cannot be described in terms of the concepts of previous levels. The process of evolution is like a ladder having various levels which are mutually integrated and related. Each level is distinct and offers a set of new qualitative changes due to fresh integration or relatedness. Thus matter, life and mind, despite being distinct, are mutually integrated. "There is no mind without life and no life without some physical basis. There are matter systems, there are life-matter systems and there are systems involving mind at various stages of development. Life stands to matter in the same kind of relation as mind stands, to life."[67] Thus the theory of Emergent Evolution claimed to have solved the perennial problem of body-mind relationship by the notion of creative synthesis which takes place at each stage of development. In this theory, matter, life, mind and moral distinctions all are regarded as real. Mind is interpreted as organisation and activity which presupposes all previous stages. The self is not that being whose essence is mere thinking as Descartes had thought. The self, on the other hand, is the being who has not only physiological needs and interests but has also thinking, creative imagination and moral sense. The thinkers who subscribe to this theory believe that only in this way the problem is solved satisfactorily.

II

Iqbal seems to be in general agreement with the theory of Emergent Evolution. But his conception of matter is different. What we call matter is not something "situated in an a-dynamic void". His method of inquiry consists in a study and interpretation of conscious experience which, "as unfolding itself in time, presents three main levels—the level of matter, the level of life, and the level of mind and consciousness—the subject matter of physics, biology, and psychology, respectively".[68] The conclusions of

[67] C. Lloyd Morgan, Emergent Evolution (New York : Holt, 1923), p. 11.
[68] Allama Mohammad Iqbal, The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam (Lahore : Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1977), p. 3l.

Einstein's Theory of Relativity led him to formulate his idealistic conception of matter. He writes:

"Personally, I believe that the ultimate character of Reality is spiritual: but in order to avoid a widespread misunderstanding it is necessary to point out that Einstein's theory, which, as a scientific theory, deals only with the structure of things, throws no light on the ultimate nature of things which possess that structure. The philosophic value of the theory is twofold. First, it destroys, not the objectivity of Nature, but the view of substance as simple location in space—a view which led to materialism in Classical Physics. 'Substance' for modern Relativity-Physics is not a persistent thing with variable states, but a system of inter-related events. In Whitehead's presentation of the theory the notion of 'matter' is entirely replaced by the notion of 'organism'. Secondly, the theory makes space de-pendent on matter. The universe, according to Einstein, is not a kind of island in an infinite space ; it is finite but boundless ; beyond it there is no empty space In the absence of matter the universe would shrink to a point."[69]

Thus Iqbal believes that matter is not n static fact situated in empty space, "but a structure of events possessing the character of a continuous creative flow which thought cuts up into isolated immobilities out of whose mutual relations arise the concepts of space and time."[70]

As regards life and consciousness, Iqbal; like Morgan, believes that they are distinct levels of the same ladder of development:

"Consciousness may be imagined as a deflection from life. Its function is to provide a luminous point in order to enlighten the for-ward rush of life. It is a case of tension, a state of self-concentration, by means of which life manages to shut out all memories and associations which have no bearing on

[69] Ibid., p. 38.
[70] Ibid., p. 34.

a present situation. It has no well-defined fringes ; it shrinks and expands,as the occasion demands."[71]

Iqbal further thinks that matter, life and consciousness, although mutually related, are distinct and the higher cannot be explained through the concepts of the lower. The mechanical laws of matter are inadequate to explain the free creative nature of life and consciousness. This is why he rejects the epiphenomenal theory and also criticises Darwinian attempt to explain the phenomenon of life and consciousness in terms of mechanism.

He believes that Reality is an indivisible whole in which matter, life and consciousness interpenetrate. But since various sciences deal with distinct aspects of Reality, we are erroneously led to think that they are isolated:

"Natural Science deals with matter, with life, and with mind ; but the moment you ask the question how matter, life, and mind are mutually related, you begin to see the sectional character of the various sciences that deal with them and the inability of these sciences, taken singly, to furnish a complete answer to your question. In fact, the various natural sciences are like so many vultures falling on the dead body of Nature, and each running away with a piece of its flesh."[72]

Natural sciences, being sectional in character, cannot give us a true and complete picture of Reality. The concepts suitable to one level of Reality are totally inadequate to explain the new qualitative changes of another level. The concept of cause and effect, for example, is no doubt true at the level of matter. But it cannot work to explain the behaviour of a living and conscious being which can be understood only by means of a concept of a different order which, according to Iqbal, is the concept of "purpose".

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[71] Ibid., pp. 40-41.
[72] Ibid., p. 42.

Human ego arises out of the creative development in which matter, life, and consciousness permeate each other, and as a living and intelligent being his nature is purposive and teleological (for Iqbal, purpose or end is not a distant goal towards which the actions of the ego are directed ; it is rather an inner principle which does not impinge upon his creativity). Thus human ego exhibits two distinct levels, i.e. the level of body or, what Iqbal calls, the colony of sub-egos, and consciousness which is a systematic unity of experiences. The verse quoted by Iqbal[73] also refers to these two distinct levels:

" 'Now of fine clay have We created man: There We placed him,a moist germ, in a safe abode ; then made We the moist germ a clot of blood: then made the clotted blood into a piece of flesh ; then made the piece of flesh into bones: and We clothed the bones with flesh: then brought forth man of yet another make' . . . (23: 12-14).[74]

The "yet another make" is the emergence of a new series of qualitative changes out of the physical organism. The distinction between the two levels, however, does not imply the separation of body and mind. Iqbal has levelled a detailed criticism against Cartesian dualism of body and mind. Likewise he has rejected parallelism and interactionism because in these theories the dualism of body and mind is presupposed. He is also not satisfied with the Leibnizean solution to the problem. If we take body and mind as mutually independent and having no apparent causal connections, then their "correspondence" is to be explained by means of some kind of "pre-established harmony". In this case the same kind of objections will arise as have been raised by Russell against Geulinx's theory. Iqbal thinks that the doc- trine of pre established harmony makes the mind "a merely passive spectator of the happenings of the body"[75] and denies its active and free role.

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[73] Ibid., p. 104.
[74] Ibid., p. 104.
[75] Ibid., p. 105.

Body and mind, he thinks, become one and indistinguishable in action. In his own words:

"We have seen that the body is not a thing situated in an absolute void; it is a system of events or acts. The system of experiences we call soul or ego is also a system of acts. This does not obliterate the distinction of soul and body ; it only brings them closer to each other. The characteristic of the ego is spontaneity ; the acts composing the body repeat themselves. The body is accumulated action or habit of the soul ; and as such undetachable from it. It is a permanent element of consciousness which, in view of this permanent element, appears from the outside as something stable. What then is matter ? A colony of egos of a lower order out of which emerges the ego of a higher order, when their association and interaction reach a certain degree of co-ordination. It is the world reaching the point of self-guidance wherein the ultimate Reality, perhaps, reveals its secret, and furnishes a clue to its ultimate nature. The fact that the higher emerges out of the lower does not rob the higher of its worth and dignity. It is not the origin of a thing that matters, it is the capacity, the significance and the final reach of the emergent that matters. Even if we regard the basis of soul-life as purely physical, it by no means follows that the emergent can be resolved into what has conditioned its birth and growth. The emergent, as the advocates of the Emergent Evolution teach us, is an unforeseeable and novel fact on its own plane of being, and cannot be explained mechanistically. Indeed the evolution of life shows that though in the beginning the mental is dominated by the physical, the mental, as it grows in power, tends to dominate the physical and may eventually rise to a position of complete independence. Nor is there such a thing as purely physical level in the sense of possessing a materiality, elementally incapable of evolving the creative synthesis we call life and mind, and needing a transcendental Deity to impregnate it with the sentient and the mental. The Ultimate Ego that makes the emergent emerge is immanent in nature, and

described by the Quran as 'the First and the Last, the visible and the invisible'."[76]

The following points are clear as regards mind-body relationship in Iqbal:

(i) That mind and body are not two independent substances in Cartesian sense.

(ii) That matter, life and mind belong to one and the same continuum as inseparable aspects.

(iii) Despite being inseparable, matter, life and mind are distinct and can be distinguished from one another.

(iv) Life and mind emerge as creative synthesis in the course of evolution.

(v) It is God or the Ultimate Ego Who makes possible the emergence of life and mind.

III

No doubt there are some philosophers who still regard The mind body problem as a genuine philosophical problem and are trying to find out a solution to it, but some thinkers are not ready to accept it as a genuine problem at all. For example, Professor A.L Ayer is of opinion that the actual problem stems not from facts but from our conceptual systems. The physiologist's account is complete in itself. He has the concepts of nerve cells, electrical impulses, etc. The difficulty arises only when efforts are made to mingle these concepts with an entirely different type of concepts, e.g. feelings, thoughts, desires, etc. Ayer thinks that there are two entirely different sets of observations (the mental and the physical) which can be

[76] Ibid., pp. 105.07,

easily "correlated". If such is the case, then we do not stand in need of finding "causal connection" or "a point of contact". This procedure may lead to the difficulty of analysing and interpreting two different sets of observations, but not to the difficulty of explaining the "mysterious interaction" between mind and body.

Ayer concludes:

My conclusion is, then, that mind and body are not to be conceived as two disparate entities between which we have to make, or find, some sort of amphibious bridge, but that talking about minds and talking about bodies are different ways of classifying and interpreting our experiences. I do not say that this procedure does not give rise to serious philosophical problems ; how, for example, to analyse statements about the thoughts and feelings of others ; or how far statements about people's so-called mental processes are equivalent to statements about their observable behaviour. But once we are freed from the Cartesian fallacy of regarding minds as immaterial substances, I do not think the discovery of causal connections between what we choose to describe respectively as mental and physical occurrences implies anything by which we need to be perplexed."[77]

[77] Peter Laslett, Ed. (Ayer): The Physical Basis of Mind, A Series of Broadcast Talks (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1957), p. 74.