

GSP2205-MODULE FOUR

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MAJOR THEMES IN PHILOSOPHY:
IDEALISM, MATERIALISM, NATURALISM
AND DUALISM

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE MODULE

- The essence of this module is to make students familiar with some fundamental strands of thought in philosophy, namely: idealism, materialism, naturalism and dualism. By the end of the module, students should be able to appreciate the following:
- Meaning of idealism and materialism as strands/schools of thought in philosophy
- Background to idealism and materialism
- The key arguments and concerns of idealism and materialism
- Divisions in idealism and stages in materialism
- Some arguments against idealism and materialism
- Some philosophers associated with idealism and materialism
- Meaning of naturalism and dualism
- Key arguments and concerns of naturalism and dualism
- Some arguments against naturalism and dualism
- Some philosophers associated with naturalism and dualism

Meaning and background

- Idealism is derived from the term idea to show and maintain the intimate connection between denotation and philosophical connotation.
- It is a major strand of thought in philosophy whose identity is the recognition of and emphasis on idea in the mind as what constitutes and creates reality. The idea is referred to as the mind, spirit or consciousness etc based on the convenience of the individual idealist thinkers.
- Historically, it was the first school of thought to emerge in an attempt to offer a logically convincing account for all happenings around us through the path of free and independent reason as opposed to faith or religious account.
- For even where a version of Idealism made reference to God as the Master Designer or the Aristotle's an Unmoved Mover, its arguments emanates from independent appeal to reason rather than a testimony of the religious scripture.

Arguments of Idealism

- For idealism, all happenings and events in the material/empirical world are ultimately dependent on spirits or ideas which do not themselves originate from the material world (Cause of events).
- Idealism sees the mind, thought or consciousness as the genesis and ultimate determinant of reality (i.e. any empirical thing).
- It is the mind that generates material things. Though nature may be the mother, there is something that transcends and is beyond nature itself.
- The idea is always there before the material object. In other words, Idea comes before Matter.
- This Idea can be in form of human mind as the Subjective Idealist would argue, or in form of God as the Objective Idealist may insist.
- *What the two versions of Idealism share in common is primacy/superiority of Idea over matter.*
- This Idea can be in form of human mind as the Subjective Idealist would argue, or in form of God as the Objective Idealist may insist.
- *What the two versions of Idealism share in common is primacy/superiority of Idea over matter.*
- *Idea is the ultimate reality whether in form of the individual mind or supernatural force.*
- *Whereas the Subjective Idealist can refer to the imaginative and enduring power of the individual mind, the Objective Idealist can cite the all encompassing scope of God to demonstrate the superiority of the Mind over Matter.*

Example from Idealism

- As example, an advanced idealist views were long ago formulated and expressed by the Greek philosopher Aristotle.
- For him there are four types of cause which were together a sufficient explanation of as many things (1) Material cause- the material out of which a thing comes to be as it is (e.g. clay from which a pot is made), (2) Formal cause-the form or definition of a thing (e.g. shape of the pot), (3) Efficient cause- the shaping activity of the potter, (4) Final cause-the purpose for which the pot is intended.
- For Aristotle, the most important is the final cause. All products of nature are produced for some purpose imposed upon nature-e.g. why do birds fly? Answer- because that is what birds are meant for. Similar examples can be given through the thought of many thinkers with the question-why does the chicken cross the road? Answers-it was an unconscious drive (Freud)-it had innate road crossing capacity(Chomsky)-for fun(Epicurus)-out of custom (Hume)-for the greater good(Plato)-it had a dream(Martin Luther King).

Some criticisms of Idealism

- The above manner of proceeding stifle thinking and in fact obstructs the search for real causes-False answers are provided without advancing our real understanding of for example birds and flight.
- Idealism also leads to the creation in human thinking of two-tier structure of things otherwise known as Kantianism: **Phenomenal**-real world which can be investigated and **noumenal** reality which goes beyond the surface things.
- Instead of explanation of certain events or questions, there is reliance on **faith**, **solipsism**-an extreme form of subjectivism associated with the denial of external reality or **agnosticism**-the impossibility of knowing or understanding the world or reality.
- In social thinking, idealist philosophy finds expression and favour among the ruling class who always want submission to things in this world the way they are without question. They are bound to argue that things have always being as they were designed to be.
- For example, a popular idealist view is that Men's ideas and attitudes are what determines the way they live-Man's thinking determines living. Yet much as there is a correlation between ideas and living, the issue is which is **primary**? Does our thinking determines our condition or our condition determines our thinking?

Some example of Idealist philosophers

- Classical Idealist philosophers include Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Schopenhauer, Hegel and Berkeley among others.
- Whereas Socrates, Plato and Aristotle represent the early Idealist philosophers, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel and Berkeley represent the modern Idealists philosophers.

Meaning and Background to Materialism

- As in the case of idea and idealism, materialism is derived from matter and the two are intimately connected in philosophy.
- Materialism is the view that all that exists is material or is wholly/entirely dependent upon matter for its existence.
- In its general sense, materialism is the view that there is only one fundamental kind of reality and that this is material.
- In a narrower and specific sense, it is the view that human beings and other living creatures are not dual beings composed of a material body and an immaterial soul, but are fundamentally bodily in nature.

Meaning and Background to Materialism(Cont.)

- Materialism emerges in response to Idealism.
- It acknowledges the contribution of Idealism to philosophy but accuse it of too much concession to religion, if not outright capitulation/submission to it.
- It arises from common/daily practices and productive activities of mankind.
- It set out to provide an alternative understanding of things on the basis of cumulative practical experience of people in their engagement with nature.
- It seeks practical and empirical answers to questions on human experience and condition.

Some key arguments of materialism

- From the onset, materialism refuses to admit the existence of spirits or ideas with any power over matter. On the contrary, ideas emerge in response to the actual material situation of people and societies across time.
- For instance, the rule of the elders (gerontocracy) is only conceivable in a communal stage of societal development while absolute monarchy cannot be imagined save in a feudal stage of development.
- For materialism, whatever happens or exists is to be explained by reference to material cause. It asserts the primacy of matter (being or nature).
- Materialism recognizes the nature of reality regardless of the existence of mankind-Matter is the primary substance, the essence of reality-Everything comes from matter and its movements is based upon matter.
- Matter produces mind and mind never exists apart from matter-Mind is the highest product of material development and the most complex form of human activity.

Some key arguments of materialism(Cont.)

- Nature exists independently of mind that no mind can exist apart from matter. It excludes the existence of immaterial or spiritual entities which allegedly direct or influence operation of nature, society and the mind.
- For materialism, events in space and time are seen as objective reality and consider that whatever happens in the material world is to be explained in the material world itself- There are things that we do not understand but that do not make them unknowable.
- In fact, whereas idealism believes that the ideas in people's heads exists outside of and independently of the world of matter, materialism contends that people's ideas, like all other aspects of their behaviour, are the product of material causes and can only be properly understood when these causes are discovered.
- People are the products of their material circumstances and their human nature, their outlook on life and their general psychology reflect the condition under which they live and work- To change people you must change their circumstances.
- For materialism, everything flows, everything changes, and there is nothing unchangeable in the process of actuality.

Stages in Materialism

- Materialism passed through some stages such as :
- **Ancient materialism** where the name of Heraclitus with his famous proposition that you cannot pass through the same river twice- and Democritus with his proposition that everything was formed from multitude of individual atoms ,are popular.
- **Mechanical materialism** belonging to the epoch of the introduction into Europe, of the forgotten learning of antiquity, and the sciences of the Arabs-Ptolemaic philosophy/Copernican revolution. Motion was viewed mechanically with the feudalists emphasizing the ordained nature of things while the bourgeoisie saw things existing in a mechanical relationship with the world as a clock which was made up of prefabricated parts.
- **Dialectical materialism** whose foundational elements were traced to Kant, Hegel and Feuerbach, while its birth and puberty were associated with Marx, Engels and Lenin.

Stages in Materialism (Cont.)

- **Kant's** theory of universe abolished the first impulse and envisaged a solar system which had evolved in the course of time.
- **Hegel's** name was associated with the famous Logic- Idea-Spirit.
- **Marx, Engels** and **Lenin** were collectively associated with such assumptions as: all processes that originate in nature and society are found in an uninterrupted mutual action; reality is a process and our thinking must correspond to reality- there has to be a concrete analysis of concrete situation; objectivity of consideration; change and development are inherent in things-their internal contradictions; the union of analysis and synthesis; changes leads to transition to other forms; and that knowledge of a thing develops from appearance to essence, from less profound to more profound essence.

Example of materialist philosophers

- Materialist thinkers or philosophers include Democritus, Heraclitus, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Fredrick Engels, and Vladimir Lenin among others.

Meaning of Naturalism

- Arising from the name, naturalism is simply the view that everything is part of nature.
- Generally, it is the view that the totality of things which we call “nature” and which are studied in the natural sciences is the totality of all things whatever. There is nothing outside, beyond or independent of nature.
- Naturalism denies the need of any explanations of the natural in terms of the supernatural or realm of value.
- Naturalism is also the view that there is no great or major difference between humans and other animals. While humanity may be regarded as “something special”, it is not completely unique and requires no act of special creation.
- On the basis of the above, man can be studied and understood using the same method as in other natural phenomenon or creatures.

Key arguments of Naturalism

- As the name suggest, naturalism sees nature as everything in the sense that all things are elemental particles of it.
- Nothing is separate or independent of nature. It is the mother and genesis of reality.
- As complex and sophisticated as man, naturalism sees man as a part of nature. In spite of man's sophistication and complexity, naturalism believe that man is an integral part of nature. As such, he can be studied and understood using the same method as in other natural phenomenon.

Key arguments of Naturalism(Cont.)

- Naturalism refuses to view man (as specie) as fundamentally different from the rest of the universe. Humanity is part and parcel of the world of things and processes. Human beings and their mental-intellectual powers are regarded as normal parts of the natural world within the control and reach of empirical science.
- All naturalists refuse to view humanity as anything over and above natural entities and processes. They do not subscribe to the existence of spiritual force or being, invisible and immortal, nor in any mysterious faculty that would place mankind above the natural order. To this extent, naturalism shares something in common with materialism-the primacy of here and now against an imaginary hereafter.

Some criticisms of Naturalism

- It is generally regarded as over ambitious and unspecific.
- It does not specifically recognize and appreciate the uniqueness and preeminence of mankind over other living things.
- It wrongly recommend a similar approach to the study of fundamentally different subject matters i.e. mankind and other living things

Meaning and background of Dualism

- Whereas preceding strands of thought took one clear and uncompromising position, dualism attempt to strike a balance between fundamentally and mutually opposed positions.
- This is a philosophical form of synthesis in which apparently incompatible and mutually opposed views are reconciled.
- Dualism is the view that there are two kinds of reality, for example, in form of matter and mind. In epistemological sense, it is the view that an idea mediates between the knower and the thing known.

Meaning and background of Dualism(Cont.)

- It is the name for any system of thought which divides everything in some way into two categories or elements, or else derives everything from two principles, or else refuses to admit more or less than two substances or two kinds of substance.
- The term dualism is also loosely applied to philosophical systems which have as their core some important opposition e.g. Plato's worlds perceived by the senses and the world of Forms known by the mind, Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal world or the Pythagoreans two basic principles of Limit and Unlimited.

Some key assumptions of Dualism

- *For dualism, reality is never a single but binary/bifurcated entity. It is based on the belief or assumption that existing things belongs to two distinct categories or entities.*
- As a trend in philosophical thinking, idealism tends to divide reality into two parts, for example Godly things and worldly things or material and mental, freewill and determinism.
- Otherwise known as Manichaeism, dualism is justified on the existence of two principles or concepts that are strongly/radically opposed to each other.

Some examples of Dualism

- This can be seen in the philosophical problem of Freewill and Determinism, religious belief in the existence of good and evil, city of God (light) and earthly city (Darkness).
- It is equally evident in metaphysics in form of finite and infinite, matter and spirit, body and mind, limited and unlimited, white and black, sweetness and bitterness etc.
- The French philosopher, Rene Descartes is famously associated with dualism so much that Cartesianism became another name for dualism. He was the first modern philosopher who tried to work a sharp and definite distinction between the mind and the body.

Some criticisms of Dualism

- It is a form of eclecticism in the sense that it lacks the courage and audacity of Idealism, Materialism or Naturalism.
- For Dialectical materialists, dualists are thinkers in the history of philosophy who have tried to take an intermediate or compromise position. As such, they neither had independent significance nor great influence on the development of science. Consequently, it's greatest and most consistent spokesmen sooner or later passed either to position of idealism or to that of materialism