

## **BODY, MIND AND YOGA**

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There is a familiar belief about man and his mind and body that has been responsible not only for gross misunderstanding of the nature of man and his mind but also for giving rise to two conflicting cultures of spiritualism and materialism, generally characterizing the orient and the occident respectively. This Cartesian tradition of treating the mind and body in the life of man as two independent substances contingently conjoined together, leads to exclusive metaphysical concepts of pure thought and pure action which eventually breeds the virtual exclusion of the two cultures I mentioned. In fact the exclusive pictures of pure thought and pure action is a special case of the more general question of the nature and relation between the body and the mind, and the supposed polar opposition between the body and the mind has virtually split man in terms of two distinct substances contingently conjoined together, thereby leaving us with the possible options of treating man either as a pure self or as a mere body, a mere mechanical artifact as it were.

I shall expose the roots of this metaphysical picture of man based, I claim, on misunderstanding the logic of the language we use to talk about man and his mind. In this endeavor I shall draw support from the philosophy of *Yoga*, which virtually rejects the supposed opposition between the body and the mind/spirit and treats them not as independent but as interdependent in the process of attaining liberation in transcendental communion of the individual self with the Universal Self.

To this purpose I shall expose the said misunderstanding as originating from a peculiar, but very common, view of the concept of mind and propose what I think to be a correct analysis of this concept which, I hope would remove the traditional misconception of man and present the human individual in proper perspective. In course of my analysis I shall use 'man' and 'mind' in their fairly general senses in which 'man' and 'person' are interchangeable and 'mind', 'soul', 'spirit' and 'self' are almost synonymous.

### **I**

The tradition in question is a very familiar tradition in philosophy of mind which treats man as made up of two distinct substances, a body and a mind, and identifies him with the mind - the body being considered as an unnecessary appendage, contingently giving shelter to or being associated with, the person. This

dualistic picture of man might easily have issued from an imperfect understanding of the language we use to talk of person or man. Let us see how: we say two sorts of things about persons; firstly we ascribe a set of physical features to them (when, for example, we say of a man that he is strong or weak, tall or short, and the like) and secondly we ascribe a set of mental features to them (when, for example, we say that someone is intelligent or stupid, thoughtful or unthinking, and the like). It is reasonable as it is natural in common usage to say that our body is the cause or basis of the physical features we ascribe to man. But the mental features apparently cannot be explained as thus related to body, since there are some purely mental predicates which can be ascribed to persons, particularly if that person is oneself, without having to identify a particular kind of material body or any sort of material body at all, e.g. imagining, remembering, thinking about a philosophical problem etc. One can engage in these activities without having the faintest awareness that one has a body at all, much less that the latter is in any way necessary for these functions to be possible. Yet the operations of these activities, the ascription of predicates implying states of consciousness, needs to be explained - preferably in a way similar to the way in which that of the physical activities, the ascription of physical predicates is explained - as *caused* by the body. A similar causal explanation is then proffered by supposing a mind, a second entity, not physical but analogous to the physical body, to play cause to all our mental acts and processes. In this way the two-fold description of human nature in our common usage gives rise to the customary belief about the nature and existence of *two distinct substances* - a body and a mind - and we are given to believe that each of us is composed of two different things like these. Though this type of dualism regarding the nature of man is a very ancient element of ordinary language and thinking, Descartes is noted as the founding father of this belief as a systematic philosophical theory. Either because of the indirect impact of Cartesianism or because of misleading appearance of the language we use to talk about persons ( I suspect the former is largely due to the latter), man's mind has been thought of as a separate object or entity, distinct from his body - analogous to it but definable in terms of all its opposite features. Human mind is thought of as the cause or bearer of qualities, analogous to it but opposite of those that are known to belong to or caused by the body. Thus it is said to be immaterial and unobservable, it does not occupy space, can't be seen, can't be touched. Unlike the body, it is no part of

the physical world, but *like the body* it must occupy *some* world - an inner, non-physical world. Unlike the body, it is not bound by physical laws, but *like the body* it must be governed by some analogous laws, some para-mechanical laws. Further, being the occupant of such a supposed immaterial and occult duplicate world, the mind is supposed to operate and determine all the conscious physical or bodily process and functions of man; and it is in accordance with *its* design and plan that all the affairs of man are carried on. A perfect ghost in the machine, as Ryle so charmingly put it. We are thus in the grips of a persuasive metaphysical picture of mind, away from the actual states of affairs and yet generated by the actual working of our language about men as conscious individuals – or rather from a gross misunderstanding of these workings, as I hope to so in what follows.

In this picture, the mind is not only given the pride of place in the life of man but is supposed to *be* the man. And once again certain peculiar elements in our language and thinking about man seem to strongly suggest this. For if the mind is not a material object and is not subject to physical laws and forces, then it will not be affected by any physical process, and even if body is destroyed in the course of physical and physiological process, the mind will continue in a state of pure existence and pure consciousness. On this logic, the mind or the soul has been thought to be immortal, indestructible and eternal. Being beyond and unaffected by physical laws, the soul is described as *achhedya*, *akledya* and *adahya*. And since the soul is also construed as the essence of the person, this has led to the belief in rebirth, reincarnation and disembodied existence. Even we are given to believe that after the termination of this (physical) life, we can be born again and again - not only in the human form but also with bodies of beasts and birds. This belief in metempsychosis is a pet feature of oriental thinking (made familiar in the Buddhist *Jataka* stories) and not entirely unfamiliar to western intellectual history. Medieval western culture was familiar with this dualistic spiritualistic picture of man and eastern society has been living with it from time immemorial.

## II

This peculiar notion of mind and consequent non-physical picture of man is a product of bad logic and imperfect understanding of the language we used to talk about man. Before I proceed to expose this, I must try briefly to pinpoint the

distortion wrought to the image of man by the concept of mind in question. Despite a few good effects of this spiritualistic view of man (which, I suspect, are more out of accident than out of logic), it can't be denied that in certain aspects of our social and moral leaving the metaphysical model of this picture is likely to cramp the intellect and create serious misgivings about the nature of man and his culture; for in this mode of thinking the mind or the soul is treated as distinct from his body and on *this* is laid all the emphasis and importance which go with the essential nature of man, and the body is treated (often scornfully, if it is not an overstatement) as a fairly dispensable part of the person. Even we are told that this body is the mundane prison which holds the soul captive and as such acts as a great deterrent in the way of liberation. Hence to seek liberation by ignoring this body, torturing it and even by 'giving it up' has been the ideal of our culture through ages. I would rather say that under the pretext of setting up justice and order (*dharma sangsthapanarthaya*) our Lord Krishna urged upon Arjuna to kill people in war and kill even his own kinsmen, because by killing them he would destroy only their mortal bodies but their souls (*they, i.e.*) would go on eternally living as immortal and indestructible. A father offers his son to be sacrificed in a *yajna* and is consoled by the belief that his son would go to heaven and leave in the abode of gods. The ideal of the soul that is enlightened, unbound, pure and eternal thus makes us disinterested in, and even hostile to, our physical existence and worldly affairs. It naturally nurtures a matching culture of spiritualism interested in a world beyond and life divine and hostile to the here and now. Divinity and humanity are torn apart and in the interest of the former we are led, gradually but surreptitiously, away from the affairs of human life.

### III

One obvious way in which the above picture of man, as issued from the described metaphysical concept of mind, can be shown to be the product bad logic, is only by demonstrating that this Cartesian conclusion regarding the nature and essence of man does not follow from the premises from which it is supposedly drawn. It is true and an undeniable aspect of our talk and knowledge of persons that each has mind and that it is essential that he should have. But to draw from this anything like the conclusion that a person *is* the (his?) mind would be as absurd and illogical as to draw from 'S's have P' the conclusion that 'S's *are* P'. Further, that the latter seems so much to follow from the former in this case might be thought to be due to another

undeniable fact that having of mind is essential to being a person. But again the conclusion does not follow that the mind *is* (even in the sense of being essential to) the person. For even though being a material object is essential to being a table, no one would wish to say that a material object *is* a table or that the table *is* (in the sense of identity) a material object. Thus from mind's being essential to person the least that could follow is that *only* mind is essential to person – much less that mind *is* the person, since something else may also be essential, and having a body might just be that<sup>1</sup>. The concept of a person is one of those clear but indistinct concepts of which no definition can be given but which can be made known only by examples<sup>2</sup>.

Now, the instances to which we apply the concept of person are those to which both a set of physical features and a set of psychological features are applied – inevitably a group of what I would like to describe as “bodied subjects of consciousness”. It is true that in this usage what distinguishes men from other bodied beings or things is consciousness, the ascribability to them of predicates implying states of consciousness. Strawson calls them P-predicates<sup>3</sup>. The ascribability of the P-predicates constitutes the differentia of persons which “we cannot dream of applying” to other bodied things. The important question is, how are these P-predicates (to be) ascribed to persons. It is the peculiarity of the logic of such predicates that, besides being self-ascribable, they are also other-ascribable. For we not only know ourselves to be persons but, in order to be able to know this, must know *others* to be persons with whom we are of a kind. The question that matters is not “Am I a person?” (nobody asks this question seriously) but “Are these other moving and acting material bodies persons?” This is because only the second question can be significantly answered in the negative whereas the first one cannot. It is fairly conceivable that a moving material body looks like a man, walks like a man and in all observable respects is like a man, *and* is not a man, but it would be self-stultifying to say that this human form (from which the speaker speaks) is not a man. “I am in severe pain” is true to the speaker who knows it to be such without his having to depend on any criterial evidence, without having to identify any material body which is his own. But when one hears someone else uttering this, the truth of what he says has to depend on criteria – on what he says, how he behaves, how is his present behavior, verbal and non-verbal, connected with his previous as well as

subsequent behavior etc. Incidentally, it is this very fact of first-person self-ascription of P-predicates being non criterial<sup>4</sup> that has deluded the Cartesians to stress the so-called “privileged access” to one’s own inner states (which, for them, is all that matters) and to picture us, persons, as purely non-physical subjects of consciousness. But this is to grossly misunderstand the problem at issue, since, as I have just now shown above, it is in the case of others - in recognizing others *as* subjects of consciousness – that the problem of what it is to be a person is relevant and significant and as such the concept of a person has not been clarified as long as a satisfactory answer to this question has not been supplied. Therefore, the question of *how* are P-predicates applied<sup>5</sup> to persons must address itself to the case of other-ascription of such predicates. As Strawson emphatically makes the point, “it is a necessary condition of one’s ascribing states of consciousness, experiences, to oneself, in the way one does, that one should also ascribe them, or be prepared to ascribe them, to others who are not oneself”<sup>6</sup>.

As is evident from the above analysis, ascription of P-predicates have to be based on criteria. But it is not the “inner” criteria of the Cartesians that is applicable, if at all, to one’s own case, of self-ascription of P-predicates. A more accurate way of saying would be that the supposed inner criterion is either unnecessary (if intended to be applied in one s’ own case, wherein the self-knowledge is non-criterial), or inapplicable (in the case of others where the very unobservability of the soul or mind and the supposed privacy thereof<sup>7</sup> prevents the applicability of such criteria). So the only criteria of personhood will have to be, as indeed they are, the outward criteria of verbal and non-verbal behavior of others, and observing the behavior of others requires observing their bodies. It follows, therefore, that to know others as persons or subjects of consciousness is to know them as bodied beings, and hence that the idea of man includes the body in order for it to apply intelligibly to the instances it does apply to. The concept of mind, which is inevitably essential to the concept of a person, is shown, on the above analysis, to be dependent on the body in order for it to apply to ourselves. However, my analysis should have adequately indicated that man should not be understood entirely in terms of the mind nor in terms of the body entirely, though both, on my showing, figure centrally in the acquisition of the concept. This is implied in Strawson’s much respected theory of the primitiveness of

person to which both predicates ascribing physical features and predicates implying states of consciousness are ascribable, but which is not reducible in terms of either or both. Thus the concept of a person as that of a *bodied subject of consciousness* is indispensable. If instead we understand person as a composite being composed of a body and a mind, contingently related, we are in the danger of emphasizing only one of these aspects of man, ignoring the other. As a result, two clashing cultures of spiritualism and materialism will inevitably emerge, as indeed I have shown they have. Consequently, the distorted image of man as either a pure spirit, unconcerned with the affairs of the physical world, or a mere body with nothing but material enjoyment as the goal of life will inevitably issue. But the unitary concept of the person as a bodied subject of consciousness gives the complete picture of man as an individual – taking due note of both the aspects of man and leaving no room for the described misunderstanding and the resulting clash of cultures.

Let me take a *detour* here and discuss briefly the philosophy of Yoga which as implicit contention of an integrated concept of a human individual very like my concept of a *bodied subject of consciousness*. Patanjali's Yoga system is the sixth of the six systems of Indian philosophy. And together with Sankhya, Yoga is concerned with achieving liberation which is possible in the union of the individual self with the Universal Self. But while Sankhya is occupied with the knowledge of detachment (*kaivalya*) for the purpose of achieving this goal, Yoga sets forth the discipline in detail. While Sankhya gives us the theory, Yoga detailed the practical side of the teaching. It shows the practical path by which one can attain *viveka jnana*, which alone can lead to liberation. (Similarity with Advaita Vedanta cannot be missed here). More than union with the universal self, as pleaded in the Upanishads and pursued by Sankhya, Yoga gave stronger emphasis on control of the body and the senses. It recommends perfection of the body. For only a sound body can prepare for a sound mind that is necessary for effective practice of *yoga*. And the two together can lead to the way of liberation, hence they cannot be treated as absolutely independent entities. A fundamental blunder of Sankhya philosophy was to treat *purusa* and *prakriti* as absolutely separate and independent realities - one as pure consciousness or sentience and the other as pure matter, purely unconscious. What this theory gives us is mere abstraction from concrete experience. But as a matter of fact, experience

always unfolds them together. Yuga philosophy therefore tries to reunite them – the metal and the physical, matter and consciousness. Physical discipline prepares for mental equanimity. This is *Samadhi*, which is transcendental communion of the individual self with the Universal Self.

The Advaitins, who considered Sankhya as *pradhana malla* (their main adversary), pointed out a contradiction in it: If *prakriti* and *purusa* were absolutely independent and opposite realities (as body and mind in the Cartesian scheme), they could never come in contact with each other and there would be no evolution. Sankara therefore alleged that neither real contact (*sanyoga*) nor a semblance of contact (*sanyogabhasa*) or mere presence of *purusa* near *prakriti* (*sannidhi matra*) can explain evolution. Yoga philosophy overcomes this contradiction by treating the two (mind and body) as interdependent and not as independent. Sri Aurobindo's *integral yoga* gives special emphasis on this by saying that only a unified Spirit and Matter would be the basis of *Integral yoga*'s path to understanding reality, that the non-being and the manifested universe are not opposites (denying each other's existence) but are only *different states with opposite affirmations*.

Broadly speaking, while Sri Aurobindo considers *integral yoga* as more of a psychological practice with internal reflection and self-analysis as the main tools of development, Patanjali's philosophy considers yoga was morally based (without which mere *asana* and *pranayama* etc would be futile in achieving the goal). God and morality take the pride of place in the philosophy of Yoga (an improvement over the atheist Sankhya), and all forms of life are taken as different stages in the march towards the supermind for Sri Aurobindo. In understanding reality and realizing the Universal Self, body and mind work as a synthetic whole – not as different and isolated. And with this account of the Yoga philosophy, we are back with our concept of a person as a composite unit – a *bodied subject of consciousness*.

The social indispensability of this concept of person or man is not the result of any revision or redefinition of our normal concept; it is rather due to our normal understanding of the concept as *this* concept which, on my showing, is logically indispensable. "Philosophy leaves everything as it is", and if one tries, consciously or unconsciously, to out step the barriers of usage and says something that is neither



contained in, nor follows from, it the result is a revisionary metaphysical picture – as we saw is evident in the Cartesian picture of man. As I have made it abundantly clear, the concept of person as a bodied subject of consciousness is what we must know persons *as*, and how we learn the meaning of the concept. It is thus the primary sense of the concept of a person. Like any other concept, this concept too allows certain extensions, or extended applications of it within the limits of intelligibility. The idea of disembodied person, or of the survival, after physical death, of a supposedly pure disembodied ego, is such an extension, dependent on, and only because there is, the primary use of the concept and as such is only a secondary use thereof. I have argued elsewhere<sup>9</sup> that the secondary use of a concept is permissible and intelligible only because there is the primary use of that concept, but *not vice versa*. “My doll is in pain”, when said by a playful little girl, has meaning only because “pain” has its meaning in the usual, human context (and *that* is its primary sense), and if the latter were not the case the former would have been no more than a series of senseless noises. Similarly, our talk of ‘persons’ in the imagined case of disembodied persons owes its very use and intelligibility to our talk of persons in the normal, embodied case, which is its primary use, but not conversely. Thus it follows that any theory that purports to stress the purely non-physical nature of persons is guilty of taking the secondary use of this concept much too seriously and of trying to give that use the status of primacy. These theories delude themselves into thinking that we are talking about the same thing here as we do in the normal case, presumably on the superficial ground that in the former case our familiar word “person” is used in its familiar configuration. It is because of this that what they say in such cases (i.e., of disembodied existence, survival and reincarnation etc.) would not be straightforwardly nonsense, but in being committed to an entirely non-physical concept of a person (and taking it to be the essence of personhood) and as such abandoning the primary sense of this concept, they would not be describing what is the case. Wittgenstein expressed an even stronger view in his remarks on the secondary use of concepts: “. . . the fairy tale (in which, e.g., a pot can be said to see, hear or even talk, PKM) only invents what is not the case, it does not talk nonsense<sup>10</sup>.”

Therefore, the Cartesian tradition and our spiritualistic culture, in so far as it issues from that tradition, despite its familiar appeal and intimate feel, is a thoroughly

misguided theory of persons, naturally presenting a distorted picture of man which is based on bad logic and misunderstanding of the language we use to talk of men or persons. It is a revisionary metaphysical picture that neither is contained in nor follows from our normal usage. Hence the resulting distorted view of man and his culture is not a matter of any concern. But it must be shown for what it is – illogical and delusive, which only a proper analysis of this crucial concept we have of ourselves can rectify.

**Notes:**

1. For this argument in detail see my *Personal Identity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Decent Books, New Delhi, 2000, pp.34-35.
2. For a detailed discussion of impossibility of a strict and non-trivial definition of 'person' see *ibid.* ch.1.
3. Strawson, P.F., *Individuals*, Methuen, London, 1965, ch.3.
4. See Shoemaker, S, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity*, Cornell, Ithaca, USA, pp. 34-35, 38. See also my *Personal Identity*, pp.46-48 for more on this.
5. Which is the same question as 'How is the concept of person possible?' cf. Strawson, *Individuals*, p.110.
6. *Ibid*, p.99.
7. See my *Personal Identity*. pp 8-10 and 18. Also Chisholm, R.M., "On the Observability of the Soul" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1969-70.
8. *Individuals*, pp.112-113
9. *Personal Identity*, pp. 209-211, 229-230, and 237-140.
10. Cf. Wittgenstein, L, *Philosophical Investigations*, pt.I.