

CHAPTER II

THE INCOHERENCE OF THE CARTESIAN ACCOUNT OF A SINGLE AND TWO THINGS.

Strawson most significantly rejects cartesianism and no - subject theory of person because these theories can not explain why we ascribe our states of consciousness to anything at all and particularly why we ascribe our states of consciousness to the very same thing to which also physical attributes are ascribed. To examine Strawson's view I propose to consider in this chapter the theory of Descartes in order to see if the theory is satisfactory. Starting first with the Cartesian theory seems to be quite in order, since it was so widespread that in reaction to this version of the concept of person much of the other versions of the concept of person emerged in modern philosophy. Norman Malcolm rightly says, 'Descartes created a picture of the relationship between the human mind and the human body with which philosophy has struggled ever since.'¹ Indeed the picture of the relationship between mind and body is historically an old one in the perspective of the concept of person.

According to Descartes when one speaks of a person, then one really speaks of or refers to mind or both mind and body which are two distinct substances of different types. It may be noted here that this very concept of person which

1. Norman Malcolm, Problems of Mind, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1972, p.1.

Descartes had formulated surely would appear to be rather incoherent for the following three extremely disparate versions, viz. (i) person is identical with mind or soul, (ii) person is a unity through and through of the mind and body, and (iii) that there is a polar opposition between mind and body. Favouring the first of these versions some examples may be put forward. In Discourse on the Method Descartes says ‘...’I think, therefore I am’ was so certain and so assured that all the most extravagant suppositions brought forward by the sceptics were incapable of shaking it, I came to the conclusion that I could receive it without scruple as the first principle of the Philosophy for which I was seeking.’² This thought is found echoed in a letter which Descartes wrote to Gassendi in replying to his objection that the proposition - ‘I am, I exist’ might have been inferred from any other action. Rebutting this objection Descartes states : ‘When you say that I could have inferred the same conclusion from any of my other actions, you wander far from the truth, because there is none of my activities of which I am wholly certain (in the sense of having metaphysical certitude, which alone is here involved), save thinking alone. For example you have no right to make the inference : I walk, hence I exist, except in so far as our awareness of walking is a thought; it is of this alone that the inference holds good, not of the motion of the body, which sometimes does not exist, as in dreams, when nevertheless I appear to walk, Hence from the fact that I think that I walk I can very well infer the existence of the mind which so thinks, but not that of the body which walks. So it is also in all other cases.’³

2. Rene Descartes, The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol. I, tr. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, Cambridge University Press, 1967, p.101.

3. The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol. II, tr. E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, Cambridge University Press, 1967, p.207.

Obviously the expression "I" of the first example 'I think, therefore, I am' is used to refer to the speaker person whose very essence is thinking and as this thinking is essentially the characteristic of the mind, so the mind in question is truly identical with the person referred to by this "I". The second example asserts the same as when Descartes concludes, 'I can very well infer the existence of the mind which so thinks' from 'the fact that I think that I walk', he purports this 'I' as the mind, as the person. Mind is properly identical with person - this view can be more strongly proved by Descartes' another assertion. He says : 'What of thinking? I find here that thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone can not be separated from me ... to speak accurately I am not more than a thing which thinks, that is to say a mind or a soul, or an understanding, or a reason.'⁴

From his important philosophical announcement that 'I think, therefore I am', Descartes further proceeds with the definite conclusion that 'I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it'.⁵ But could I say each time when I am not pronouncing it, i.e. 'I am, I exist', or I am not mentally conceiving it or at time of sound sleep when I am not conscious of my existence at all that I am not or I do not exist ? And, then, how do we explain the continuous existence of ours which actually we do have? Now if 'I think, therefore, I am,' is correct and if the 'I' is identical with mind and the mind with person, the consequence would be the following viz. that the mind thinks, therefore, the mind is or the person thinks, therefore, the person is, and thus the mind is person or the person is mind. The argument which Descartes provides for this seems to be very weak. He says that he is only a thinking thing

4. The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol.I, pp.151 - 152.

5. *Ibid.*, p.150.

for the obvious reason that even in dream when the movement of his body does not exist, he still sees himself walk and thus he is right to conceive in the way that he is truly a thinking thing or that he is identical with his mind. But the question is, when in the state of deep sleep we do not have any consciousness and when we do not see ourselves as the thinking things, then what should we conceive of that state? As far as the nature of the cartesian demonstration is concerned, one is to admit that whenever a person in sound sleep does not think, he does not exist, but the actual fact is that in that state also the person exists.

When Descartes says, I can very well infer the existence of the mind which so thinks, then if he means that mind is identical with person, then what does he actually mean ? Does he not say merely that a person can very well infer the existence of a person who thinks so or a mind can infer the existence of a mind which is his mind and which thinks so? The position is such that he can not infer his existence or at least speak of the existence of his mind in the way he does. For if it is admitted that a person is identical with his mind, then at any time or at any moment the question of the identity of the person which has definitely a wide currency would arise and certainly this is the area where problems start for the obvious snags which are as follows.

(1) The Cartesian position leads any one including Descartes himself to utter absurdity for the simple reason that while he asserts to prove the existence of the person from the very nature of it he obviously fails to establish its existence. Mind being a private colony of some states and processes publicly never observable, is completely unidentifiable and if it is so then one can not say that I am a thinking thing.

(2) Again Descartes stated that thought can not be separated from him. But the example of sound sleep may be taken to counter his claim. In a state of

sound sleep one is not conscious of one's process of thought i.e. thought at least in this state could be absent and thus in this state one is not strictly a thinking thing.

(3) To prove that I am a thinking thing, as Ryle states, I am to prove that I am not an unthinking thing. On Cartesian philosophy this can not be settled and if it remains unsettled, it also can not be proved that I am a thinking thing, i.e. person.

From an outstanding train of reasoning the celebrated English philosopher Hobbes criticises Cartesian line of argument concerning the fact that I am mind. He says, 'It does not seem to be good reasoning to say: I am exercising thought, hence I am thought.'⁶ According to Hobbes thought is the property or the essence of the subject which thinks, so the two can not be the same thing. It was his conviction that the thing which thinks is rather a subject of the mind and the thing. therefore, in nature is corporeal. Here, of course, Hobbes' view is historically significant; nevertheless the line of his reasoning being defective for its one-sidedness reflects the understanding of the sole corporeal character of the person. As for Descartes' reflection that his thought can not be separated from him, Hobbes remarks that 'I, the very self that thinks, am held to be distinct from my own thought; and, though it is not really separate from me, my thought is held to be diverse from me, just in the way that leaping is distinguished from the leaper'.⁷

The replies which Descartes supplies to meet the objections raised against him by Hobbes, however, have been obscure as well as ambiguous. As to Hobbes'

6. The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol.II, p.61.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

objections Descartes says that thinking may be used in three different senses - action, faculty of thinking and the thing itself that thinks - and, therefore, the thinking and the thing that thinks or the faculty of thinking and the thinking thing are not the same thing but only when they mean the same thing they are identical. Descartes' followers might hold here that his attempt is based to some extent on the ordinary use of language and this ordinary language can confirm the claim he makes. For in his reply Descartes writes : 'But, wholly without any reason, and in opposition to the ordinary use of language and good logic, he (Hobbes) adds, hence it seems to follow that that which thinks is something corporeal; for the subjects of all activities are indeed understood as falling within the sphere of substance (or even, if you care, as wearing the guise of matter, viz. metaphysical matter), but not on that account are they to be defined as bodies.'⁸ And so Descartes is seen to pronounce that he is a thing which thinks. What is the nature of this thinking thing? He responds, 'It is a thing which doubts, understands [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels.'⁹

The second version of Descartes' person theory is straightforwardly a contradictory version of the first one. In Meditation VI Descartes says : 'Nature also teaches me by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, etc., that I am not only lodged in my body as a pilot in a vessel, but that I am very closely united to it, and so to speak so intermingled with it that I seem to compose with it one whole ... For all these sensations of hunger, thirst, pain, etc. are in truth none other than certain confused modes of thought which are produced by the union

8. Ibid., p. 63.

9. The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol.I, p.153.

and apparent intermingling of mind and body.’¹⁰ The fact that the mind is really coextensive with the body has also been stated by Descartes in article 30 of the part I of The Passions of the Soul, and it is as follows : ‘That the soul is united to all the portions of the body conjointly.’¹¹ Moreover, Descartes from his firm conviction that he is sensible of many things including other bodies existing around him concludes that ‘it is quite certain that my body (or rather myself in my entirety, inasmuch as I am formed of body and soul) may receive different impressions agreeable and disagreeable from the other bodies which surround it’.¹² Here it is obvious from all these sorts of assertions that Descartes is of the view that a person is a compound of body and mind.

The third formulation of Descartes’ concept of person is metaphysically too weak as a concept that it stands incompatible with the second one. For if a person is the unity of both mind and body, how can we conceive that there is a polar opposition between them? Again if a person in question is identical with mind, how can there be a unity of the mind, a thinking and non - corporal substance on the one hand and the body, an unthinking and corporeal substance on the other? But Descartes writes in Mediation VI : ‘And although possibly (or rather certainly, as I shall say in a moment) I possess a body with which I am very intimately conjoined, yet because, on the one side, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and as, on the other, I possess a distinct idea of body, inasmuch as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, it is certain that this I [that is to say, my soul by which I

10. Ibid., p.192.

11. Ibid., p.345.

12. Ibid., p.192.

am what I am], is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it.’¹³

From a completely different point of view Descartes also argues in support of his postulated mind-body dualism, and the argument stated by him is the following : ‘...that there is a great difference between mind and body, inasmuch as body is by nature always divisible, and the mind is entirely indivisible. For, as a matter of fact, when I consider the mind, that is to say, myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking thing, I can not distinguish in myself any parts, but apprehend myself to be clearly one and entire; ... But it is quite otherwise with corporeal or extended objects, for there is not one of these imaginable by me which my mind can not easily divide into parts, and which consequently I do not recognise as being divisible; this would be sufficient to teach me that the mind or soul of man is entirely different from the body, if I had not already learned it from other sources.’¹⁴

Another argument which Descartes introduces in his Discourse on the Method to let his readers think of the distinction between body and mind, may be cited here. The argument is : ‘From that I knew that I was a substance the whole essence or nature of which is to think, and that for its existence there is no need of any place, nor does it depend on any material thing; So that this ‘me’ ... is entirely distinct from body, and is even more easy to know than is the latter; and even if body were not, the soul would not cease to be what it is.’¹⁵

13. Ibid., p.190.

14. Ibid., p.196.

15. Ibid., p.101.

From a study of the above three formulations of Descartes' person concept I purpose to form a series of arguments where sufficiently one will stand to rebut the other. For example, if person is identical with mind, it can not be a unity of body and mind; and if person is a unity of the two, the stated dualism of mind and body is not conceivable and, therefore, if the first formulation is true, the third formulation is also logically true, and the second formulation would be false. Reversely if the second formulation is valid, the first and the third formulations respectively would be invalid. Now reducing the first formulation, as it seems to me, into the third one we may ultimately get two versions of the concept of person in Descartes' philosophy, viz. (1) person is identical with mind and so, the mind is distinct from the body, and (2) person is a unity of mind and body. For the need of my concerned study I would like to deal first with the first of these two versions and try to see what really Descartes has meant by this distinctness of mind and body. Margaret D. Wilson argues : '(1) If A can exist apart from B, and vice versa, A is really distinct from B, and B from A ... (5) I can clearly and distinctly understand the possibility of A and B existing apart from each other, if : there are attributes ϕ and ψ , such that I clearly and distinctly understand that ϕ belongs to the nature of A, and that ψ belongs to the nature of B (and that $\phi \neq \psi$, and I clearly and distinctly understand that something can be a complete thing if it has ϕ even if it lacks ψ (or has ψ and lacks ϕ). (6) where A is myself and B is body, thought and extension satisfy the conditions on ϕ and ψ respectively. (7) Hence, I am really distinct from body and can exist without it.'¹⁶ From this suggestion which is a clear exposition of Descartes' epistemological argument that mind is really distinct from body, she remarks that this argument is as much

16. M.D. Wilson, Descartes, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1986, pp. 197-198.

as strong to reject the idea that it rests on nothing; though there remains the problem of clear and distinct conception of the mind as a thinking thing. But this argument to prove the distinctness between mind and body is not understandable because the mind actually does never survive in a disembodied state. What would be the problem if I had existed for ever as a disembodied soul? Obviously the answer, *inter alia*, is, as Malcolm says, that there could be no 'distinction between you and me - a concept of different selves'.¹⁷ So on the very basis of the attributes of thought and extension it is not proved that mind is really distinct from body and can exist without it.

Indeed from the fact that thought is the essence of mind and extension of body we can never argue consistently that mind can exist without a body. An argument, however, may be employed favouring Cartesian dualism that if two things are entirely different, they can exist in separation and mind is entirely different from body and so mind can exist without body. The first premise of this argument is wrong because two things may be entirely different and still they can not exist in separation, e.g. the scent and the shape of a flower. The scent can be smelt and thus can not be observed, while the shape can be observed but can not be smelt, and from this entire difference between smell and shape it can not be stated that these two, viz. smell and shape can exist in separation because both of these attributes are the attributes of the same flower. Similarly thought and extension are the two different attributes of the same person. As the scent is not of the shape and vice versa, likewise the thought does not belong to what extension does and vice versa, and still differently they are the attributes of the same person. And, thus, the architecture of the edifice of Descartes' person theory seems to be defective.

17. Norman Malcolm, Problems of Mind, p.7.

Argument somehow from another line may be offered to defend the Cartesian dualism. It may be stated that the separateness of mind and body only entails the possibility of conceptual separation of them and not the actual one. But even this account is unacceptable since the idea of this possibility of conceptual separation of the thing itself that thinks from the body is simply empty. Very naturally, of course, Descartes has had a problem which he seems to have set within a context of philosophy to withstand the universal mechanism of Galileo and Hobbes, the champions of the view that a person is a complex machine. And to evince how a person differs from a machine he offers a causal hypothesis. He says that the non-purposive automatic behaviour of a machine is governed by mechanical causes; while the purposive intelligent behaviour of a man is governed by non - mechanical causes; and thus with a view to distinguish between mechanical and non-mechanical causes, he ultimately represents the dualism of mind and body in which mind is postulated as a field of non-mechanical causes and body as a field of mechanical causes.

Gilbert Ryle is of the opinion that it is Descartes' causal hypothesis which is ultimately responsible for his category mistaken mind - body dualism. But it appears from a close examination of Ryle's view that he only tactfully manages to show by criticizing the Cartesian concept of the two sidedness of person that a person is understood only if the co-ordination of his two collateral histories are understood. When, however, he says that the person does stand for an additional member of the class of which these mind and body are members; it seems that he has just been trapped in his own language game because from Descartes' works he can not pick out considerably any premise necessary to the proof of his assertion. Indeed Descartes has never proposed that person may be conceived as an extra member of a class of which the mind and body are members. Of course, it is also true that Ryle had hoped to help other theorists recognise the

malady and get benefited from his medicine. But it is a matter of regret that his prescribed medicine has not been the best one owing to its side effect just mentioned above. There are some other complications which might be put against Ryle's theory. I shall come to these points later.

The second version that a person is a unity of mind and body seems to be rather some thing as intensive since the Cartesian problem of the mind - body dualism appears to be falling under a general problem of the unity of human being or person. As Descartes himself has admitted that he is not lodged in his body like a pilot in the vessel. On the contrary, he is very closely united to it. But what of the nature of this close unity? Does it mean that a person is an essential unity of mind and body? It is a problem at least which may be seen to run through the philosophy of Descartes. When, however, like Aristotle, it is said by Descartes that there will be no essential connection between mind and body if the mind is admitted to be present in the body as a captain is in his ship; he seems to have given emphasis on the substantial unity of them. And this is quite clear from the fact that the dualism with which Descartes has been concerned is not a dualism in the strict sense. In strict dualism person in fact comes to be an impossibility. C.A. Van Peursen puts this point as follows : 'A strict dualism in which soul and body negate each other would constitute an impasse for further philosophical reflection about man.'¹⁸

Interestingly Descartes' reflection regarding the 'I' or the thing it- self that thinks is important. He remarks. 'But if it is so that I have no body it is also true that I can neither walk nor take nourishment.'¹⁹ Further he says, 'I considered

18. C.A. Van Peursen, Body, Soul, Spirit : A Survey of the Body - Mind Problem, Oxford University Press, London, 1966, p.19.

19. The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol.I, p.151.

myself as having a face, hands, arms, and all that system of members composed of bones and flesh as seen in a corpse which I designated by the name of body.’²⁰ Even Descartes admits that ‘one can not feel without body’.²¹ From the reading of these lines it may be said that Descartes’ intention was not to formulate a thoroughgoing dualism to uphold a view that mind and body - the two heterogeneous universes - can never make an integrated unity. From another direction this idea may be explained. Descartes recognizes interactionism to explain that physical occurrences can have mental directions and mental states and processes can have physical effects. In article XXXIV of the first part of The Passions of the Soul, Descartes explains how the soul and the body influence one another. And this close relation between mind and body is a most commonplace phenomenon in the history of each person because he knows it well that sometimes his mind causally affects the body which certainly seems to be his body and vice versa. It is thus seen that the arguments which Descartes provides for the dualism of mind and body do not prevent him from admitting that the mind of a person is closely united to his body. And this sanctions the view that Descartes’ dualism was not logically a strict one.

Moreover, from the lines of a letter which Descartes wrote to Regius, it is known that the union between mind and body is not something adventitious, but is essential. A startling remark of Descartes here in this perspective may be cited from Principle II of the second part of his Principles of Philosophy. The remark goes : ‘It may be concluded also that a certain body is more closely united to our mind than any other, from the fact that pain and other of our sensations occur without our foreseeing them; and that mind is conscious that these do not

20. Ibid., p.151.

21. Ibid., p.151.

arise from itself alone, nor pertain to it in so far as it is a thinking thing, but only in so far as it is united to another thing, extended and mobile, which is called the human body.'²² What then, shall be the point as a conclusion ? Irrespective of the conclusion whatever it might be, one fact which without any controversy may be stated here is that Descartes in his celebrated philosophical way of journey from the route of dualism of mind and body of a person to his unity and vice versa gets lost the way of his destination and, therefore, in his different philosophical works he just fabricated an edifice of assertions, arguments, etc. which are ambivalent in nature to keep behind him the crossroads for his successors to select from that any direction no matter how one chooses it to fit his temperament to construct one particular system to explain him. And it is obvious from the numerous articles and books which are made on him from different angles of vision by a great many philosophers, scholars and commentators. From Descartes' own confession also it is quite clear. In a correspondence with Elizabeth he writes : 'It does not seem to me that the human mind is capable of conceiving quite distinctly and at the same time both the distinction between mind and body, and their union; because to do so, it is necessary to conceive them as a single thing.[*une seule chose*], and at the same time [*ensemble*] to conceive them as two things, which is self-contradictory [*qui se contrarie*].'²³

But still one central question I want to raise. How far is Descartes successful in explaining the concept of person? I think that the importance of the Cartesian concept is there in its strength rooted in the very attempt and response to deal significantly with the problem of human unity. From another

22. Ibid., p.255.

23. M.D. Wilson, Descartes, pp.206-207.

direction what seems to me very important is Descartes' humble assertion acknowledging his state of confusion. This example of confusion, of course, is not only a patent example of philosophy. It may be seen equally importantly in the field of philosophy of nature or physics. One such example is the concept of force because the scientists are in a state of utter confusion in explaining the unity of force. That there are persons or human beings and in this respect there is no doubt but while philosophers try to explain the nature of these persons they positively experience the difficulties in identifying which entities are persons. This same sort of problem the scientists experience while they try to understand the concept of the unity of force. One thing, however, that there is force can not be doubted by any one at all. But whether the force should be one, two, three or four in number that is the question. Newton explained gravitational force. Nowadays it is admitted on all scientists' hands that force is of four kinds, viz. gravitational, electro-magnetic, weak, and strong force. And it has been a great endeavour of some scientists to unify all these four different kinds of forces into one. Einstein particularly for a long span of thirty years has tried in vain to get unified these forces. The principal aim of all these scientists is to establish one theory, named unified field theory, by which it will be possible to prove that practically though these forces seem to be different, really they are the four fold manifestations of the one reality. But what is that one reality ? Thus we can see while the philosophical problem is how to explain the unity of mind and body, the problem of physics is how to explain the unity of the four natural forces each of which is different and independent from others.

So it seems that in philosophy Descartes has done something quite outstanding at least in the range of his philosophical endeavours to explicate the nature of human being and though failed to complete the task consistently, nevertheless, his effort may be compared with that of Einstein's who failed to

explain the unity of the natural forces. It is interesting that Abdus Salam and Stephen Weinberg have succeeded only to some extent to explain that unity of the forces just having started from the station where Einstein has stopped. Similarly Descartes' achievement is that milestone from which a number of philosophers are seen to start their journey.

Now let us see the attempt of P.F. Strawson who highlights the main complexities of the problems related to the concept of person. He provides some justification with a view to defuse Descartes' confusion just demonstrating the incoherence of his view and the cause of his confusion. In his famous book Individuals, Strawson claims to have offered a new account of the concept of person specially from the perspective of his celebrated concept of descriptive metaphysics.

Descartes indeed had a real problem to explain the concept of the human being or person, although he admits the sui generis relation between the mind and the body of a person, for the following reason, namely, he fails to estimate the fact that we ascribe our states of consciousness to the very same thing, as Strawson says, to which we also ascribe our physical characteristics and here-in lies the great cause of the Cartesian confusion. This Cartesian confusion is completely different from the so-called concept of category mistake as suggested by Ryle. Ryle's conception of category mistake is to a greater extent irrelevant owing to its one-sidedness. He only gives focus to the one side of Descartes' mind-body problem, viz. that there is a polar opposition between mind and body and thus deliberately neglects other sides. That is to say, he has not seen the problem in its real Cartesian context. And actually the problem of the dualism of mind and body of a person was not a practical problem for Descartes but indeed a purely

philosophical one. So when Ryle says, 'Now the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine does just this',²⁴ it seems ridiculous since Descartes does never conceive mind in that sense. Further, it was Descartes' confusion responsible for his dualistic account and not the category mistake as Ryle conceives it. If two things X and Y belong to two logical categories, then if one thinks the sameness that they do belong to a same category, then he, according to Ryle, will be creating the category mistake. But Descartes' recognizance of the interactionism and the unity of body and mind approves it at least that mind and body belong to a same thing designated as human being. What I want to say is that if from taking the example of Descartes' dualistic account of mind and body Ryle just purposes to show destructively that a category mistake is the source of this dogma of the ghost in the machine, then from the other arguments cited by Descartes, namely, the arguments for the unity of a human being Ryle's conception of the category mistake may be just disproved.

Indeed Ryle's formulation of the idea of category mistake is not applicable to the case of mind and body. His example of the concept of university is undoubtedly an organising concept because the different sorts of concepts such as the concepts of college, administration building, controller's office, Registrar's room, libraries, museums, playing fields, etc. each of which is known separately by observation are organised by the organising concept of a university. But the case of a person is not like this. Here the person is known directly by observation and to him the different attributes are ascribed. Significantly the university and the different units what it organizes belong to two logical types or categories, and if their sameness of category is admitted, then no doubt it certainly will be a category mistake. But the mind and body are not like the units of university that

24. Gilbert Ryle, The Concept of Mind, Penguin Books, 1978, p.23.

the person should have organized them. Further, the so-called mind is not an observed unit like a library of the university. The concept of person can not be explained as an organising concept. It is not a case that a person's body is purely material (except in the case of a dead person) having had no consciousness at all and his mind is the field of consciousness having no relation with this body at all, i.e. they are as separate as units of the university and, therefore, whenever the coordination of these two we understand, we understand the person. Ryle's highlighting, however, would have been fatal, had the Cartesian dualism been a strict one.

It is P.F.Strawson who seems to have studied the concept of person in its right perspective of the speaker hearer senses. He says that when we as speakers and hearers talk of ourselves we ordinarily ascribe to ourselves actions, intentions, sensations, perceptions, thoughts, feelings and memories including corporeal characteristics like shape, height, colour and weight. So, according to Strawson, the questions which arise forthwith in this context are : (1) 'Why are one's states of consciousness ascribed to anything at all ?' and (2) 'Why are they ascribed to the very same thing as certain corporeal characteristics, a certain physical situation, &c. ?'²⁵ These are the two basic questions with which I began this chapter. At the very outset I have said that, according to Strawson, Cartesian theory can not provide sufficient answers to these fundamental questions. Let us now examine it in details.

Strawson says that a possible Cartesian response to these questions could be the uniqueness of the personal body found in perceptual experience. The question, then, is : how does the uniqueness consist ? To give a clear account of

25. Individuals, p.90.

the ways in which the features of a person's perceptual experiences are uniquely dependent on his body he states : 'First, there is that group of empirical facts of which the most familiar is that if the eyelids of that body are closed, the person sees nothing... second, there is the fact that what falls within his field of vision at any moment depends in part on the orientation of his eyes, i.e. on the direction his head is turned in, and on the orientation of his eyeballs in their sockets. And, third, there is the fact that where he sees from - or what his possible field of vision at any moment is -depends on where his body, and in particular his head, is located.'²⁶ These facts explain why the body of a particular person occupies a certain special causal position with regard to his perceptual experience. But then Strawson says straight away that these points can not give us any expected suitable answer to those questions. But why ? He says, 'They explain ... why I feel peculiarly attached to what in fact I call my own body ... But they do not explain why I should have the concept of myself at all, why I should ascribe my thoughts and experiences to anything.'²⁷ It is in fact Strawson's claim that even if it is admitted that states of consciousness are ascribed to something and those facts in question dependably explain why a particular body is ascribed to that same thing to which it stands in some unique relation, nevertheless those facts in question do not account why the physical characteristics are to be ascribed not simply to the body uniquely related to the thing to which states of consciousness &c. are ascribed, but to the thing itself to which those states of consciousness or so-called mental characteristics are ascribed. And it is a fact which according to him is evident from our ordinary usage of the word "I", e.g. we say 'I am bald', 'I am cold', 'I see a spider on the ceiling', 'I have a toothache', and so forth and so

26. Ibid., p.90.

27. Ibid., p.93.

on. Strawson is, therefore, justified in concluding that those facts do not illustrate the ordinary usage of the word "I" which really provides us with the concept of person.

It will be a good attempt to see now the Cartesian position from a vision giving proper stress to the key problem that it is not possible for him to conceive either at the same time both the distinction between body and mind and their union, or to disclaim any one of these two. Keeping in my consideration this complex situation of Descartes' mind - body problem I intend to study whether this Cartesian position is capable to stand in the face of the criticisms Strawson just points out. Descartes' position as is not quite clear so I try to examine separately his two accounts in the face of Strawson's arguments.

Strawson's observation which is already stated is that we do ascribe to the same thing both the states of consciousness and corporeal characteristics and that the questions necessarily arise from this observation are quite two in number, viz. why one ascribes states of consciousness to anything at all and why to the very same thing as the corporeal characteristics &c. If Descartes' platform of his mind - body dualism is concerned, it would be seen as the necessary consequence, that Strawson's second question does not arise at all. For Descartes says, 'I understand in a complete manner what body is [that is to say I conceive of body as a complete thing], merely by thinking that it is extended, has figure, can move. etc., and by denying of it everything which belongs to the nature of mind. Conversely also I understand that mind is something complete which doubts, knows, wishes, etc., although I deny that anything belongs to it which is contained in the idea of body.'²⁸ Thus as states of consciousness -private particulars-only

28. The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol.II, pp.22-23.

belong to mind and physical characteristics to body, so it may be a possible Cartesian response to Strawson's question that it is in fact a linguistic illusion that both types of properties are assigned to the same thing. But while this Cartesian view escapes one of the questions, Strawson says that 'it does not escape, but indeed invites the other : 'why are one's states of consciousness ascribed at all, to any subject ?' ²⁹

The above view of Strawson may appear to be one-sided as one notable point of Descartes has not been counted up by him. The point is what we may call Descartes' advocacy for the unity of body and mind. Obviously when Descartes says, 'But there is nothing which this nature teaches me more expressly [nor more sensibly] than that I have a body which is adversely affected when I feel pain, which has need of food or drink when I experience the feelings of hunger and thirst, and so on; nor can I doubt there being some truth in all this'³⁰, he seems to have counted the fact of human unity against his account of dualism. Now if there is some truth in this view that a person has both mind and body in the sense that they are very closely united to one another, the question that why states of consciousness are ascribed to the very same thing to which also physical attributes are ascribed, it seems to me, can legitimately arise in the Cartesian context. The statement 'I experience the feelings of hunger and thirst, and so on' might be assumed to ascribe the mental characteristics to the subject designated by the use of the word "I". Again when Descartes says, 'I have a body which is adversely affected when I feel pain', the supposed corporeal characteristics, like height, shape and weight are attributed to that same subject. What I like to note here is the fact that if one fundamental notion of Descartes, viz. his dualism is

29. Individuals, p.95.

30. The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol.I, p.192.

° true then his another equally important account for the unity of mind and body is also true. It may, then, appear as a strange matter that most of the celebrated thinkers ingeniously only explained the nature of dualism ignoring the account of unity while Cartesian problem of dualism falls really under the problem of the unity of person or human being.

It now seems as very significant that Descartes' approach is such an approach that with the help of it we can get a consistent theory to explain the unity of person no matter what are its negative aspects. But truly his theory got to have ended in his double accounts of 'I' in one of which the 'I' is replaceable by the unity of mind and body, and in the other the 'I' is replaceable by the mind, for having pleaded that he understands his mind as a complete thing with the help of clear and distinct idea of it and then, again, defending his claim that I am only a thinking thing, he clearly said that the only meaning of 'I' is 'mind'. Thus from this contradictory account of Descartes' person theory the outcome that emerges is that this very concept of 'I' which the conceptual requirement of our ordinary language would not permit, can not be granted as the single locus of the predicates belonging to two different categories. Also, if some critics of Descartes had explained only the dualistic aspect of his theory of person to show that it is ultimately a theory having no effective result, nothing goes wrong obviously for the logical ground that from $P \sim P$ any conclusion may be derived. And Strawson's claim, then, that why we ascribe our states of consciousness to the thing to which also we do ascribe the properties which we ascribe to the three-dimensional extension, does not arise in the Cartesian views. Even if it is argued that this question may arise significantly in the Cartesian views still the proper answer from that side can not be obtained.

Strawson's first question too is a question of the type that Descartes' explication of the concept of person does not seem to answer it. Strawson says : '... if we try to think of that to which one's states of consciousness are ascribed as something utterly different from that to which certain corporeal characteristics are ascribed, then indeed it becomes difficult to see why states of consciousness should be ascribed to, thought of as belonging to, anything at all.'³¹ His another essential remark in this regard is quite noteworthy. It states, '... 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.'³² In the light of these assertions Strawson makes, it would be clear to see his position in the historically metaphysical background of the Cartesian account of the concept of person.

31. Individuals, p.98.

32. Ibid., p.99.