

Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind and Cognition

Prof. Ranjan K. Panda

Prof. Rajakishore Nath

Department of Humanities and Social Science

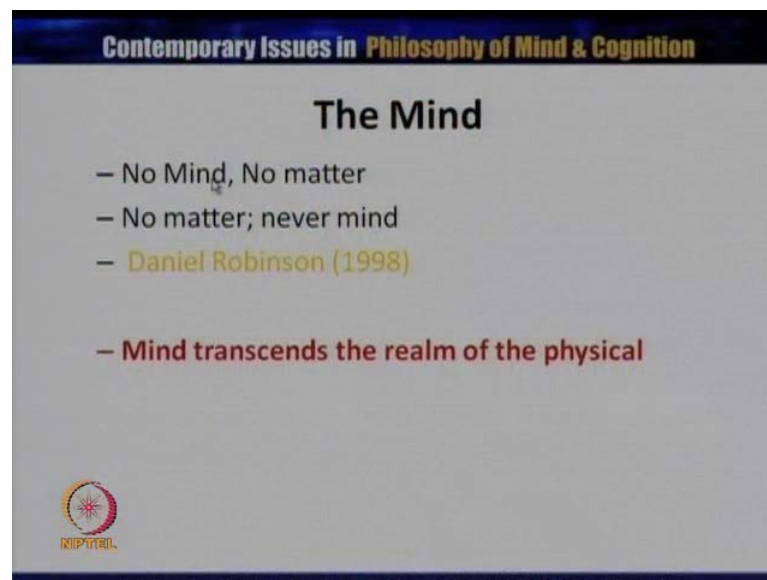
Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay

Lecture No. # 02

The Transcendental Consciousness

Let us begin with the notion of consciousness and how it has been discussed in the history. Consciousness is considered as a transcendental reality. So, today's lecture will be about the transcendental notion of consciousness. The transcendental notion of consciousness is discussed from both western, as well as from the eastern perspective; the eastern, I mean, the Indian perspective, that consciousness is a transcendental reality and it has a special ontological status.

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It is ontologically independent of the matter. So, today we will discuss, what is the transcendental notion of consciousness? And how it has been viewed from both Indian, as well as from the western perspective?

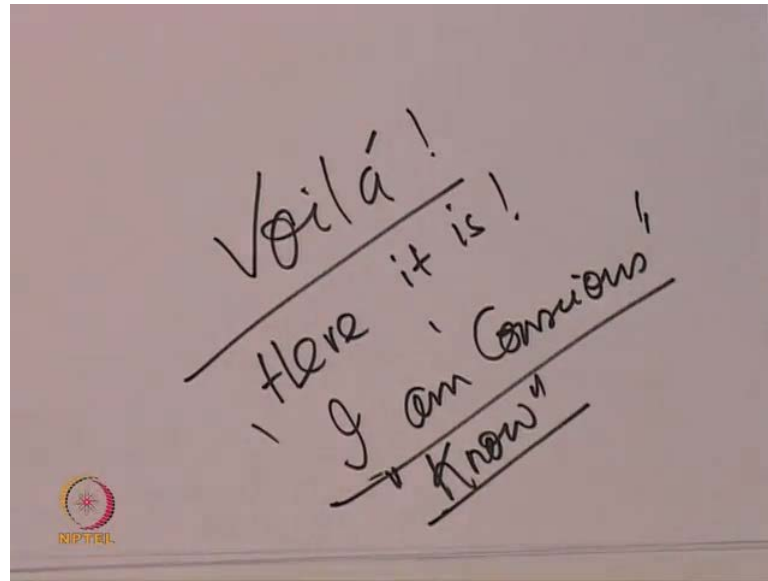
The transcendental notion of consciousness suggests that no mind, no matter; if there is no mind, then there is no matter. Now, this 1st statement is about the existence of consciousness that consciousness is epistemologically and ontologically prior to the existence of the matter. So, if you negate, if you nullify the existence of consciousness or mind, then we will not have any discourse about the world. So, the, the existence of the world depends on the existence of the mind, but how does this thesis work?

If we look at the 2nd statement, that is, no matter, never mind, is entirely opposing the 1st statement; no mind, therefore no matter. Now, this typical statement I have been quoting from Daniel Robinson, spoke the mind, published in 1998 by (()). Robinson suggests that these two statements summarize the entire history of consciousness studies, that consciousness is viewed from a spiritualistic perspective, where we accept the primacy of the mental, the primacy of the mind from both ontological, as well as from the epistemological point of view.

Precisely, this is an epistemological discourse because the knowledge about the external world, knowledge about the material bodies is possible, if and only if, we logically presuppose the existence of the mind. The mind is a knower, is the knowing subject, which knows the matter. So, therefore, if there is an absence of a knowing subject, then the presence of the object or the known or the matter is insignificant. So, the existence of matter is ontologically meaningful and epistemologically meaningful, if and only if there is a mind, there is a conscious mind.

A conscious mind is a mind, which knows the reality knowing the world, observing the world and talking about it. So, the whole discourse of knowledge and the knowledge of reality presupposes that there exists a mind. So, this presupposition is strongly accepted by the transcendental theory of mind. The transcendental theory of mind talks about its ontological primacy because for them mind is independent of the material body. The existence of mind does not depend on the existence of the material bodies as the function of the material bodies can be explained by certain natural laws. The existence of consciousness is not explainable with the help of the same natural laws, which are applicable for the explanation of the worldly bodies. Hence, we need to talk about the ontology of mind with the help of its own features.

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Now, what is that feature? As Robert Solomon points out once in his book, the little book of philosophy Solomon, writes about consciousness saying, that look at this French expression, *voilà*. The *voilà* means, here it is; that means, I know, that I am conscious, I am aware of this fact, that I am conscious.

The very fact, that I know, that I am conscious is precisely a kind of an epistemological activity. It is an epistemological activity and it is as an epistemological engagement with consciousness, that is, we need to see how the transcendental hypothesis tries to theorize consciousness and what are its justifications to suggest, that yes, this theory is kind of a valid theory. If consciousness has to be logically presupposed, then we need to look at, with the descriptions given for this hypothesis is real description, is logically viable description; if they are not logically viable, then probably, we have to reject the transcendental hypothesis.

But then, we need to look at where this debate is originating from. The debate is originating from the discourse, a yearly Greek philosophy, if we try to look it from a western philosophical perspective. The debate is also there in Upanishads when you look at it from an Indian perspective. So, the transcendental hypothesis, that consciousness is real phenomenon, this reality is conceived from epistemological as well as from the ontological point of views.

We need to look at this how, you know, Upanishad perspective gives an interpretation of the hypothesis and how the three big philosophers, even including the Plato and Aristotelian notion of mind, gives an interpretation to the transcendental thesis. So, the very idea, that mind is a transcendental reality tells us, that mind transcends the realm of the physical. So, this, the notion of transcendence is something which is beyond, which is over and above something. So, the transcendental mind or transcendental consciousness will talk about the notion of consciousness, which is over and above an ordinary notion of consciousness.

The very fact, that I encounter my consciousness in my day-to-day experiences, so for example, I am seeing all of you, I am experiencing your presence, is could be a kind of an ordinary sense experience I have. I say it is ordinary (()) quote because it is so simple because consciousness is, is viewed from finite modalities, I mean, the expression of the sense, experiential consciousness exhibits finite modalities in which consciousness is present.

So, the transcendental consciousness, on the other hand, would talk about some kind of infinity, some kind of the presence of universal consciousness, which is beyond or over and above the everyday notion of consciousness. So, that is how, I would put a kind of a transcendental consciousness.

The other way of looking at transcendental consciousness is to talk about self awareness, that how does the knower know his consciousness. So, this self awareness is something significant because it gives us a clue to prove, that yes, there is something called an I or the self, which is pure consciousness and that is beyond this expression of the ordinary sense experiential knowledge. So, that is what we would try to look at.

So, this idea of a transcendental theory of consciousness would somehow go against the hypothesis, that no matter, never mind. It does not give primacy to the matter; it does not give primacy to the matter because the materialistic perspective, that studies mind and explains its various features.

Complex features look at the notion of consciousness from evolutionary perspective, from a functionalist perspective, from a behaviouristic perspective. So, therefore, the materialistic theory of mind would presuppose the ontology of matter. Hence, this thesis goes against the previous statement, which says, no matter and therefore, no mind.

So, let us talk about, what is this ontology? The ontology speaks about, is there a mind, if at all there is a mind, then what kind of stuff it is and what are the features of this mental life? So, the nature of mental life is to be studied, is to be analyzed and that would give some kind of evidence to talk about the transcendental thesis of consciousness.

So, we need to identify this stuff, we need to name this stuff, just saying here it is, I am conscious, but I do not know what it is, where it is and not able to know, quote-unquote, not able to know what exactly it is, is a quite puzzling thing. So, therefore, we need to look at historically how consciousness has been defined. So, therefore, that external view of mind is to be brought in to talk about consciousness.

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If I stick to the earlier statement - no mind, no matter - then I am giving an impression or trying to emphasize on this point, that is, the primacy of the mental, the primacy of consciousness, which is a logical primacy, primacy that is grounded on certain ontological basis and on epistemological basis. So, that would say some kind of immaterialism I am holding or there is some kind of a monism I am holding to.

Monism, as you know, is a meta-physical thesis and philosophy began with meta-physics. The metaphysical enquiry discusses a significant question, the meta-physical enquiry delves into the notion of consciousness, the notion of reality with this question, that is, what is reality? What is the underlined principle of the reality as a whole? And as such, if this question is to be answered, then the transcendental perspective of mind

would come up with this answer, that reality is based on consciousness, that is, to say, that it is from consciousness everything has evolved.

So, the existence of consciousness is ontologically and epistemologically grounded on a universal principle called consciousness. So, as a monistic theory it suggests, that consciousness is real, so the existence of matter, in fact, theoretically, reducible to the existence of the mind. This is one kind of, you know, reduction saying, that consciousness can explain the existence of the world, the existence of the material bodies and its functions. So, this thesis, from that point of view, this thesis therefore, holds, achieve some kind of a reductionism happening here when you stick to monism. This could also happen in the case of materialistic monism, which suggests, that matter is real and therefore, consciousness is the byproduct of the matter.

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So, the monistic materialism would suggest an alternative hypothesis, which will go along with the 2nd statement that we had suggested, that is, no matter, never mind. Therefore, we need to see what are the other meta-physical possibilities? The other meta-physical possibilities are a dualistic hypothesis; say, both matter and mind are real. The moment you say, that both matter and mind are real, you hold down to the thesis, that matter is ontologically real and mind is also ontologically real; they have their independent ontological status.

So, therefore, we need to talk about a kind of a medium, an alternative principle, which would connect these two ontologically independent phenomena, so mind and the matter, consciousness and the matter.

So, is dualism a viable thesis, that we will be discussing with reference to an important modern philosopher, which is considered as the father of modern philosophy, René Descartes. Now, Descartes dualism makes a significant intervention in the whole discourse of contemporary philosophy of mind, the Cartesian dualism, as it is popularly known to us, it is also called official thesis; Ryle called as an official thesis.

Now, official thesis maintains, that mind is categorically independent of the matter. So, it is important for us to explicate the dualistic perspective of mind, we would discuss it separately and extensively, but before that it is also important to look at the other taxonomies. So, for example, idealism or parallelism, historically if you look at liabilities (()) liabilities talking about parallelism, where both mind and matter interacts and liabilities maintains, that this introduction is based on the principle of harmony. There is a kind of a harmonious introduction between mind and the body.

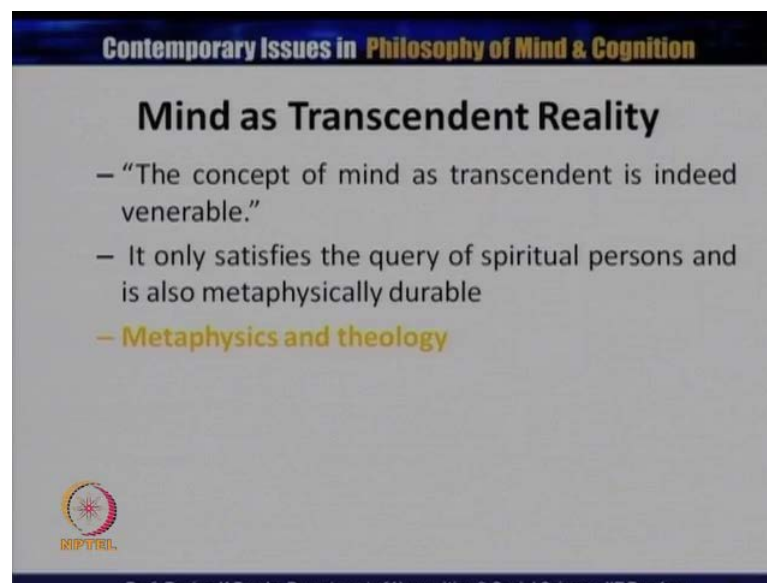
And in the contemporary philosophy of mind, one can relate to this idea of parallelism with reference to the debate, which we have on supereminence theory of mind or emergence theory of mind. So, the idea of parallelism or a parallelistic theory of mind advocated by liabilities as a critic to the dualism, the Cartesian dualism is something significant and how the supereminence theory or the (()) notion of mind adheres to the thesis of parallelism, do they negate, do they accept, we will discuss that. I am sure Professor (()) would also reflect on this aspect of the theory of mind, particularly the supereminence theory of mind.

So, let us come back to this idea of the taxonomies. So, there are various taxonomies, which are viewed from a meta-physical point of view, that there is only one reality, the underlined principle of the realities. One, the underlined principle of the realities is more than one, say two, and if you accept monism, then what kind of monism, whether it is a monistic materialism or a monistic immaterialism or spiritualism. So, that one has to think.

When we read the contemporary debate, it is very important, that we need to reflect on this historical facts about the monistic theory of mind, the idealistic theory of mind and

the dualistic theory of mind because these are the (()) and how these (()) are rejected by the contemporary philosophers of mind? Why they find, that this (()) are problematic theories of mind? Why they find, that meta-physics or the meta-physical theory of mind is, is something very insignificant? So, before they will be in detail to the contemporary debates it is important therefore, to look at what the transcendental thesis of consciousness is posing to us.

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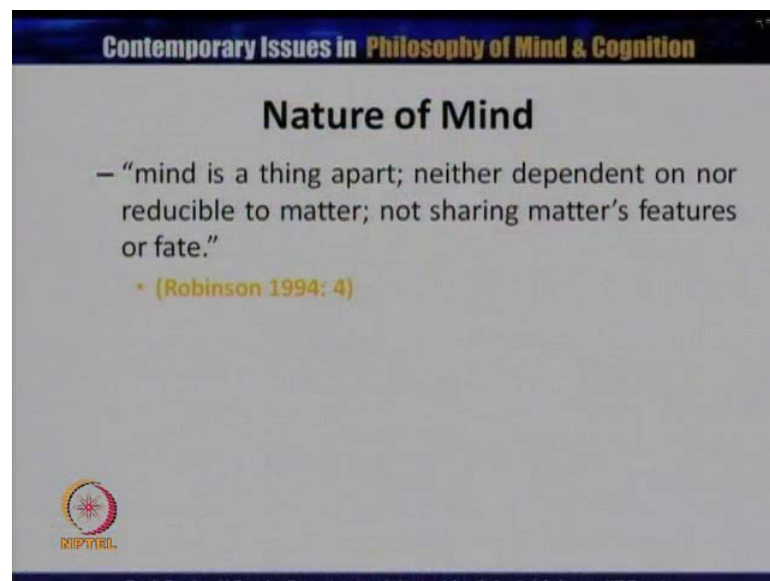
Now, it is certainly posing a very serious claim, that is, the concept of mind as a transcendent is indeed venerable. We know that it is venerable, then what is that we were going to study? It only satisfies the query of spiritual persons and also metaphysically durable. As long as you are pursuing a metaphysical thesis, then it is important to talk about transcendental notion of consciousness, that is, what kind of a feeling, which provinces reading of the transcendent mind give to us.

Otherwise, if you are debating on the contemporary issues because the contemporary issues and philosophy of mind deals extensively with the scientific understanding of mind. Hence, the science of mind rejects the metaphysical thesis; the science of mind rejects the spiritualist principles. They do not require a thesis where self consciousness is an important epistemic category to talk about the identity of self. If at all they talk, they talk with a different vocabulary altogether.

(()) would say when the two theory differs, the two theories speaking two different languages, they may be using the same vocabulary, they may be using the same terms, but they use it differently meaning, thereby the meaning of the particular term differs from theory to theory and when meaning differs, the (()) differs. So, if that kind of change is permissible and the contemporary understanding of philosophy of mind adheres to the change of vocabulary and tries to construct its own hypothesis about understanding the self identity or advocating the self identity, then we need to see, whether their interpretation is justified from a scientific point of view.

We are certainly skeptical about the theory of mind, in the sense, that we are skeptical about proposing the metaphysical theory of mind, but is it the case, that we can avoid metaphysics? Is it the case that we can suspend metaphysics and talk about the reality? What kind of reality it would be if there is an absence of mind?

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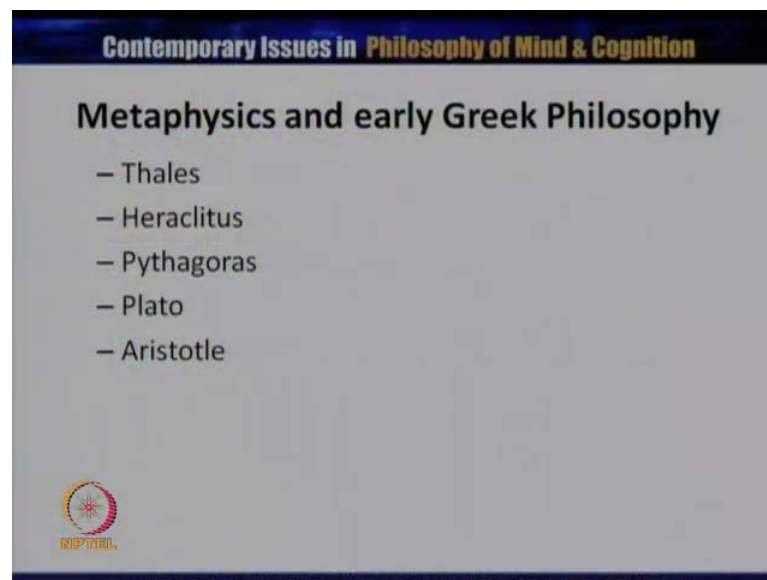
Now, Robinson states that mind is a thing apart; neither dependent on nor reducible to matter; not sharing matter’s features or fate.

So, this is what is the transcendental thesis would talk about. The transcendental thesis talk about the nature of mind in this way, that it is not sharing the feature of the matter. Matter has different properties, matter has different features and these properties are knowable. The science is trying to explain these properties and day-by-day we have

better explanation of the properties; we are having more and more knowledge about matter.

So, this kind of a progressive attitude, the way science progresses pursuing a **suffistemic** activities, we need to see, whether we have a similar philosophical progress happening in the discourse of mind. We are saying that mind does not share the properties of matter; mind is not dependent on the matter. So, if that is the theoretical point we were going to talk about, then we need to look at what is the transcendental thesis we are going to advocate. The transcendental thesis of consciousness talks about the metaphysics of mind and the metaphysics of mind is discussed, as I said, from the (()) philosophy to the Socratic period and in the modern and the medieval periods of philosophy.

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Thales, who started with this thesis, that water is the constituents of reality, this is a metaphysical hypothesis or democratic, who talks about atoms is the foundational metaphysical principles, which would explain the nature of reality.

So, their point of views, the pre-Socrates philosophers point of views, (()) emphasizing on a metaphysical study of reality. Pythagoras talked about numbers, so the whole **nature-centric (())**, which we find in the pre-Socratic philosophy, is trying to systematically answer the metaphysical questions, that what is reality as a whole and as such.


And what is the foundational principle on which the reality is grounded and with the help of that principle we can explain the reality. So, if that is a kind of a metaphysics, which say, the pre-Socratic philosophers or the Socratic philosopher's, philosophers belong to the Socratic period or advocate, then we need to look at their point of views.

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Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Pythagoras & Plato

- Mathematical knowledge is comprehended by virtue of mind's rational character.
- It is a special kind of self-discovery (discovery of eternal truth)
- 'Knowing thyself means subtle or less personal than one might assume.'
- True knowledge is eternal

 NIPTEIL

Prof. Binay K. Saha, Department of Humanities & Social Science, IIT Bombay

Their philosophical thesis says Pythagoras and the Plato look at Pythagoras conceptualization of mathematical numbers; mathematical knowledge is comprehended by the virtue of mind's rational character. Though Pythagoras talks about number is the ultimate form of reality because with the help of numbers we can quantify the things. So, but Pythagoras is also concerned with this notion of mind and by virtue of mind's rational characteristics, we try to know the existence of numbers.


So, it is the mind, which conceives the existence of numbers, the ontological existence of number. So, it is a kind of a special self-discovery, the discovery of an eternal truth, hence assuming that there is a mind and the mind is engaged in epistemic activities. The activity of understanding the eternal truth, understanding what you called the self-knowing, the self, the true knowledge as Plato says, or eternal knowledge, it is eternal because it is objectively true, it will never be false, ok.

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Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Plato

- Sense perception give illusory knowledge
 - * Parable of cave
- True knowledge is transcendental
- Soul is **Perceptual, Emotional and Intellectual** operations of the mind.
- **Divine mind**

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The scientific propositions is (()), but the kind of truth, which Plato is advocating, it says, that it is objectively true, it is universal and therefore, it is eternal. Now, as you all know, Plato makes a distinction between sense perceptual knowledge and the eternal knowledge. The sense perceptual knowledge can vary from context to context, it may appear illusory, it is doubtful that self perceptual knowledge is true knowledge.

It is explained in his famous parable, called the parable of cave, I will talk about it in my lecture on Plato's theory of mind, but briefly tell about the parable in the parable of cave. The prisoners look at the shadows and they find, the shadows are real, the mind conceives the shadows as a reality and later on, the prisoner finds, that is not the reality, that is not the true notion of reality; reality is something different.

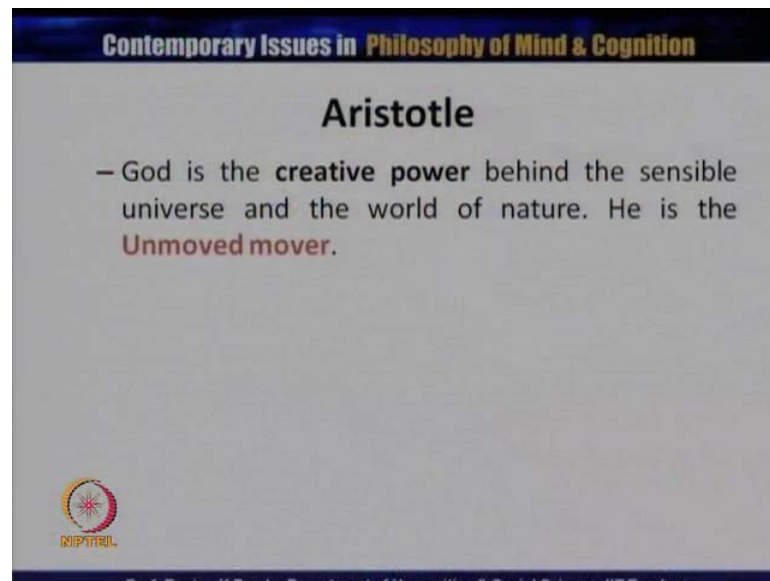
Shadows are not real. So, there is a difference between what Plato calls opinion or **Doxa** and knowledge; knowledge are real. When you talk about knowledge, we need to talk about the knower who is engaged in these perceptual activities in the emotional and intellectual activities because it is the mind or the spirit who is engaged in these activities.

So, there is a kind of a divine mind, which Plato and Aristotle is talking about, even the Greeks are talking about the divine mind. The Indian philosophy is emphatically advocating on the divine mind, the universal consciousness called the Brahman; it is the

Brahman who is a universal knower. So, the Brahman, which is the creative of the universe, so therefore, Brahman is the first cause in the medieval history.

You will also find, that Augustine, (()) and many religious thinkers are talking about God, the spiritual being is the creator of the universe.

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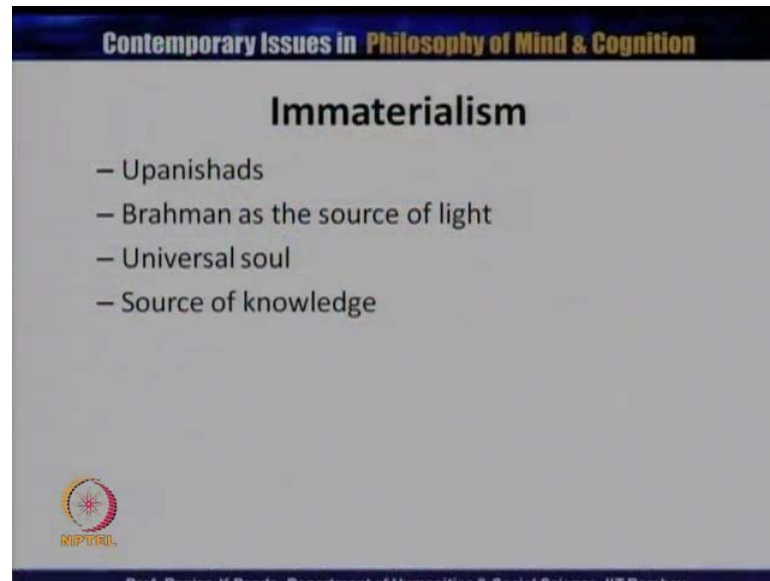


Aristotle talks about the notion of an unmoved mover. The notion of an unmoved mover (()) Aristotle says, God has this creative power, the divine mind has this creative power, it is the power, which has designed the entire universe.

So, in that sense, you have clues. You have clues here in the philosophical thesis of traditional Greek philosophy. The traditional Greek philosophers, the pre-Socratic and Socratic period philosophers, the medieval philosophers like ((), Augustine and many others and also to some extent, in fact, the great extent, Descartes is also accepting the religious view of mind.

The transcendental thesis is supported by the philosophical and the religious thesis advocated by traditional Greek philosophers and the medieval philosophers and to great extent Descartes, who is a sympathizer of the religion.

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We also need to look at the Indian perspective, Upanishads, where the great source of knowledge advocates immaterialism. As I said, Brahman is the universal consciousness, is the source of the entire creation and Brahman is the knower, it is the knower and it is the creator and it is the creation itself.

So, there is no creation and created dichotomy when we talk about the universal consciousness called Brahman, as it has been viewed from the perspective of Advaita-Vedanta. Advaita-Vedanta denies the dichotomy, that exists between the knower and the known (()) the moment when realizes, that everything is Brahman, the ontological dichotomy is dissolved; it is dissolved forever.


So, this realization is not only an epistemic realization about the existence of oneself, about the existence of one's own being, but also knowledge or realization about the existence of the nature of the entire reality, the entire cosmos. So, a realized being is a being who knows the entire cosmos, the cosmic reality, which is a transcendental form of reality, independent of our everyday consciousness. So, that is what know the (()) or the (()) talk about.

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Contemporary Issues in Philosophy of Mind & Cognition

Metaphysical-Epistemic thesis

- There must be knowledge independent of experience
- All experience must be related to senses
- Non-sensory knowledge is non-material knowledge
- Being immaterial mind as such is 'embodied' without itself being a body.

 MIPTEL

Prof. Dr. B. S. Rao, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, IIT Bombay

Now, look at this metaphysical-epistemic thesis that we are concerned with before; I will be talking about the Upanishads little later, but let us summarize what this metaphysical epistemic thesis of transcendental theory of consciousness.

Now, the transcendental theory of consciousness talks about, there must be knowledge independent of experience. So, all that we see, all that we perceive are not permanent, they are not true. See, this notion of permanence eternity or eternal is a notion of appearance and reality is something very significant. When you say that reality, we accept the, the notion of reality is a kind of an eternal principle. When you talk about change appearances, we mean, that these are not really real, they are just a temporary phenomenon, their existence is temporary, their existence is condition. Hence, the knowledge about those phenomena is also conditions and therefore, they are not permanent knowledge. So, the metaphysical and epistemic thesis would talk about the knowledge of consciousness, knowledge of the transcendental notion of consciousness, for you say, that it is independent of our experience of the objects, which are empirically there, which are there in the mundane world.

So, all experience must be related to senses, that is, our empirical experience are experiences of everyday life about the mundane world, but the knowledge of the eternity is a non-sensory knowledge. The knowledge of the self, the knowledge of this transcendental consciousness is a non-sensory experience. It is not, that it is not an

experiential knowledge, it is indeed an experiential knowledge, but that is not a sensory experiential knowledge.

The experience of the shadows, which Plato is talking about, is certainly an experiential knowledge because the prisoner were perceiving the shadows' reality, but shadows were found not real, shadows were mere appearances. Hence, the sense experiential knowledge is not an eternal truth. So, the transcendental thesis poses a kind of an argument, argument for the existence of consciousness, which is experienceable in a non-sensory way.

So, therefore, it is a non-sensory knowledge, is an immaterial, non-material knowledge. Being immaterial mind as such is embodied without itself being a body. So, it is the mind, which decides its existence; it is the mind, which talks about its primacy.

So, in that sense, from an epistemological point of view, mind is not dependent on the body. So, whenever we talk about the metaphysics of mind, we need to bring in this epistemic element. Otherwise, the discourse from the metaphysics of mind talking about the transcendental thesis of consciousness will not make sense. So, today, let us conclude with this idea, that the transcendental thesis of mind talks about the metaphysics of mind.