

PHIG – Sem -2 –GE-2 - Interactionism & Parallelism – Saswati Ray – 8th April
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Interactionism & Parallelism

Interactionism : There is a very close and intimate connection between mind and body . It is common experience that mind influences body and body acts upon mind at every moment of our life .

Descartes advocated the theory of interactionism between mind and body . Mind and body are two separate and independent substances created by God. Extension and the thought or consciousness are the essential characteristics of body and mind respectively . Descartes maintained that these two substances interact and there is a causal relation between the two . When I feel pain or sorrow there are tears in my eyes , when my body is injured my mind also feels disturbed. The spiritual substance of mind has a definite location in the pineal gland of the brain at which point , it influences upon the body and is affected by the brain process.

According to this doctrine , bodily or nervous processes are at times supposed to cause mental experiences and at other times are caused by them.

Criticism :

1. If two substances are entirely different and heterogeneous , supposed by Descartes , how can the one act upon the other causally ?Causal connection presupposes qualitative likeness and quantitative equality between cause and effect . That's why a nervous process can cause another nervous process but not a mental one . Similarly a mental process can cause another mental process but not a physical one .
2. How can the immaterial , non-spatial mind have a location in the pineal gland ?
3. This doctrine violates the **law of Conservation of Energy** . It is a general conclusion of science that the total amount of energy in the physical universe remains constant .It can neither increase nor decrease .There may be transformation of one kind of energy into another e.g., heat is changed into light . But the total amount of energy remains the same in this transformation process . But if a brain process is transformed into a mental one , certain amount of physical energy ends in mental activity and so physical energy goes on decreasing . Similarly , if a mental energy can cause a physical movement , certain amount of mental energy ends in physical movement , some amount of physical energy will be added to the physical order .
4. The problem of the relation between mind and body has been falsely created by Descartes . To think that there is an utter dualism and separation between mind and body is to make the solution of the problem impossible . Thus interaction as advocated by Descartes appears to be dogmatic .If we want to reach any solution of this mind –body problem absolute dualism between mind and body must be avoided .
5. Sir Gilbert Ryle , in his book , 'Concept of Mind' , describes Cartesian Dualism as "**the dogma of the ghost in the machine**". To him , to think of a causal relation between body and mind , which are of actually different categories ,results in a fallacy, namely **Category mistake** e.g., arithmetic takes part in the horse race competition etc.

6. That's why the theory of **Occasionalism** emerges where it is said that mind and body do not interact but the action of the one is the occasion of divine interference to effect the corresponding change in the other.

Psycho –physical parallelism /Double –aspect Theory: Spinoza who advocated the double – aspect theory ,maintained that mind and body are not two independent substances but are two parallel manifestations or correlative aspects – the inner and the outer –of one and the same reality. Mind and body are two attributes or manifestations or modes of the same substance , God. They run parallel. The substance itself is generally conceived to be unknowable by human beings, but two of its aspects ,the mental and physical ,are known.

It is as if one is passing down a corridor with a mirror on both right and left , and one's body is reflected in both mirrors. One mirror is the physical and the other is mental ,and they both simultaneously reflect different aspects of the same substance ...the man himself/herself. This is easy enough to see in the case of the mirror , but not so easy to see in the case of the mental – physical relation.

According to this theory every mental process has its corresponding bodily or nervous process and every bodily process has its corresponding mental process. This theory insists that there is no causal connection between bodily and mental series. The relation is one of mere concomitance in time and they are constantly parallel. Causal connection exists only between one mental state and another or between one nervous state and another. Though body and mind are not causally interrelated ,yet every change in one system is accompanied by a corresponding change in the other and thus the two series run parallel.

Criticism : According to this view mental and physical events are merely two aspects of the same underlying substance...God. Against this view it can be argued:

1. Though Spinoza takes thought and extension as two attributes of one substance – God , yet the essential difference between them is not denied and the so-called dualism remains .
2. Parallelism drives us to the position that mind is present whenever there is bodily activity. If every bodily process has corresponding mental process ,digestion being a bodily process must have a corresponding conscious experience .But there is no mental correlate at all. According to this doctrine, all physical or bodily processes , whether organic or inorganic, will have their parallel mental processes. Mind is spread out everywhere in the universe parallel to all material changes. This is called **Panpsychism** ,which seems absurd.
3. Parallelism makes mind useless in biological development as according to parallelism , mind cannot exert any influence upon bodily action and all activities can be done by the organism without the help of mind .But we find an increasing importance of mind in organic evolution.