Lecture 1

INTRODUCTION

About the lecture: This is an introductory lecture of this course. In this lecture we discuss various important issues, such as, ontology of the mind, the notion of transcendental consciousness, the problem of dualism, mind body identity theory, reductionism, the representational theory of mind and meaning, personal identity, biological naturalism, artificial intelligence, consciousness and creativity.

Key words: ontology, consciousness, dualism, body, pluralism, disagreement, philosophy, science

The contemporary issues in philosophy of mind and cognition delve into several philosophical issues centered around the notion of consciousness. The mind and the cognition are inner realities of the conscious mental life. But sometime these concepts are theorized differently. For instance, the analysis of the concept of cognition has a physical connotation, rather than having strong connection with consciousness. In other words, cognition can be explained not necessarily with reference consciousness. On the other hand, the mind has a metaphysical connotation and often being stated at par with consciousness. The mind is necessarily consciousness. In this course, we will be more dealing with the notion of mind and consciousness, sometimes taking them as synonyms, rather than talking about cognition. Only when we talk about functionalism and connection with reference to the philosophical study of Artificial Intelligence, we would deal with the notion of cognition. So the mind and cognition as two different concepts and have different meaning is indeed a recent phenomenon. We would not seriously get into this debate here, rather would like to deal with the notion of consciousness or the mind as a unitary mental phenomenon.

The concept of mind has been theorized in many ways, the issues here are concerned with different characterization of the mind. For instance, the mind has been traditionally conceived as a transcendent reality. To conceptualize its existence, we need to transcend the very mode in which we have knowledge about the external world. The objects in the external world exist independent of the mind. The knowledge of the external world and the knowledge of the mind
are different in the sense that they are conceived differently. More precisely, the consciousness transcends the epistemic mode in which it conceives things. In this regard, the issues that are discussed are the transcendent mind, dualism, mind-body identity theory, reductionism, subjectivity, qualia, meaning, creativity, freewill and personal Identity. As philosophers have been debating and discussing about the nature of the mind from the time immemorial, these issues are found significant with reference to the central question namely: what is consciousness? To answer this question, there are two things we need to focus on in our study, first the analysis of this question, and second is the nature of the philosophical inquiry.

The question, ‘what is consciousness?’ is indeed a complex one? As Paul Johnston, in the context of responding to Wittgenstein’s statement ‘consciousness is life itself’ says we need to study the concept of consciousness and its relationship with other concepts.\(^1\) It is interesting to note that large numbers of philosophers still consider that consciousness is something beyond the ontology of the physical. And this is happening in 21\(^{st}\) century when we notice significant progress has been made in the field of neuroscience, artificial intelligence, cognitive psychology, and many other scientific disciplines regarding the brain studies are making their claim very straight that ‘consciousness is something to be scientifically studied.’ Meaning thereby they do not see consciousness as something special and exist beyond the neurophysiology of the brain. Hence, the ontology of consciousness depends on the ontology of the brain. Hence, we begin with this issue that ‘what is the ontology of consciousness?'

Our second focal point is to talk about the nature of philosophical inquiry. In other words, what is the philosophical inquiry all about the concept of consciousness/ mind? Philosophy is a rational enterprise that studies the problem without making a dogmatic or nihilistic claim. Its rational approach is shown in the usage of concepts in a perspective and evaluates them critically. A perspective signifies the theoretical standpoint from which a particular concept is viewed, whereas the critical evaluation refers to the analysis of the concepts used in the theory. Philosophy aims at clarifying concepts, so that the problem associated with the study is resolved. This has been the basic approach of analytic philosophy. We will be using linguistic conceptual analysis as method to discuss the issues that are stated above. As some of the analytic

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philosophers of mind are influenced by the scientific study of consciousness, our study will focus on those theories to capture the nuances of the concept of mind.

The whole endeavour here is to understand the issues from theoretical perspective of linguistic philosophy. As we all know that philosophy is a foundational discipline investigates things logically, rather than making the study completely empirical. Science does pursue empirical study – it studies the empirical facts. In fact, science tries to explain the origin of these empirical facts. In this context, Wittgenstein gives a fitting remark in the *Tractatus*. He writes, “Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences. (The word ‘philosophy’ must mean something whose place is above or below the natural sciences, not beside them).”

Philosophers do study ‘facts’ emphasizing clarity and elucidation. Science, on the other hand, focuses on verification and testing. Philosophy does not show interest to subject itself to testability. Philosophical knowledge is conceptual. And, philosophical explanations are about **understanding** the nature and use of the concept in details. Of course these concepts are related to life. Hence, demands clarification and elucidation.

Philosophy is a **humanistic** discipline. It studies ‘the ultimate and the general features of all existence’. In other words, how genuinely we encounter them in our everyday life “we think about the existence of the world and the destiny of man in the world.” There is no single method or single mode of doing philosophy. Philosophical activities is carried in multiple ways, thus it is inevitable that philosophers are bound to have **Pluralism** and **Disagreement**. Philosophy presents a pluralistic scenario of theories, thesis and methods. “Disagreement is the permanent facts of the philosophical solution. Philosophy grows in best way when there is disagreement. This also reveals the inner dynamics of philosophy as an ascientific theoretical discipline. Disagreement generates possibility of new philosophy with a new method and new solution.”

So, the progress in philosophy depends on not merely rejection and confirmation of philosophical ideas, rather it is more about acceptance. And, the acceptance of a philosophical knowledge demands **rational consensus**. It is because philosophical worldview does not overrule one another. Rather proliferates in many ways pertaining to our everyday activities in

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life. For example, within analytic naturalism, there are many theories of mind, such as biological naturalism, functionalism, physicalism, emergentism, etc. However, their quest for truth lies in their engagement and description of the world. Secondly, these theories do not discover new facts, rather present new knowledge of facts. Philosophizing, thus, needs critical thinking and concept formation. Not merely with justification, but reflection. It is because in the process of articulating new concept the old concept is displaced. According to Pradhan, the concept displacement is very much part of the philosophical inquiry. Philosophical knowledge concerning progress is ought to be intelligible, and that would help building rational consensus.