
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO ATHEISM/A-THEISM

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to provide some familiarity with the different religious and non-religious views regarding Religion; with special reference to atheism and how it comes to have the prominence in the contemporary world. By the end of this unit, you will be familiar with the following:

- The idea of theism
- The distinction between atheism and other related concepts
- Non-theistic religious views (a-theism)
- Non-theistic, non-religious views (atheism)
- Different kinds of atheism
- Origins of modern atheism
- future of theism-atheism debate

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The key to understanding a variety of views that goes under the name of atheism/a-theism is the relationship between religious experience and language. Profound religious experiences present us with a paradox. On the one hand, it gives to the experiencer (or experient) an insight into the nature of reality, an insight that is so remarkable that the person feels impelled to talk about it; like the crow that has found a good source of food crows the loudest to call its friends, a person with a remarkable religious experience cannot but talk about it. On the other hand, the nature of the insight gained is such that the experient finds himself or herself dumbfounded, unable to find the right words to talk about it. The result is a whole lot of babbling that often indicates something right about the experienced reality but is never accurate; it may even be misleading, if not properly understood. This need to talk, together with not being able to find adequate

expression, can lead to contrary and even contradictory views regarding religious reality, leading to various theistic, atheistic, and agnostic views. While the theistic or at least some kind of religious view remains prominent in today's world, atheism is no less prominent with some atheistic books like Richard Dawkin's *The God Delusion*, even becoming a best seller. It is important, therefore, to understand atheism.

1.2 THEISM, ATHEISM AND A-THEISM

We shall try four different approaches to understand atheism: etymology, history, common usage, and a phenomenology of doctrines.

Let us begin by considering the meaning of the word "atheism". Etymologically, "atheism" is the denial of theism. The word "theism" comes from the Greek word "theos" meaning "god". Theism, then, is belief in the existence of god or gods and— and atheism is the view that deities are creations of the human mind, imaginary beings that really do not exist. An etymological route to understanding atheism, however, is only of limited help. Besides neglecting non-theistic religious views, it also neglects the fact that there are different kinds of theism such as monotheism and polytheism.

A historical route to the definition of "atheism" also does not take us far, as it always turns out to be the denial of a particular conception of the deity. Socrates in ancient Greece, for example, was accused of being an atheist by his countrymen; early Christians were accused of being atheists by the Romans. This was in spite of Socrates claiming that gods had spoken to him, and Christians engaging in regular religious worship and prayer. The reason why the accusers of Socrates and of the early Christians called them atheists was, then, not that they did not believe in *any* deity, but that they did not venerate the deity whom their accusers venerated.

If we go by the common usage, "atheism" refers primarily to the denial of the deity as understood in the monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All these three traditions understand the deity to be One (hence *monotheism* with God spelt with a capital G), a benevolent personal Being who created the world and all that is in it, and continues to interact with this creation. Again, the use of "Being" with a capital B is significant because the divine reality is held to be unlike any other reality we are ordinarily familiar with. For this reason the ordinary reality is often qualified as mundane reality, contrasted with the sacred reality. If everything in the world—including human being— can be considered beings, then God is not a being at all. The difficulty in going by the common usage is that it neglects the complexity involved in the conception of the divine. Therefore, let us attempt an understanding of theism through the phenomenology of religious beliefs. This will help us to attempt some conceptual spring cleaning and distinguish between "theism" and "monotheism", "atheism" and "a-theism".

Let us begin by considering what may be called "religious realism", or the beliefs that are common to all religious believers. All religious believers are agreed that (1) there is indeed a religious reality, a reality that is experienced by numerous people. These people say that the nature of this reality is (2) completely unlike the objects experienced in our ordinary sense experience and (3) the good of human beings (indeed, of the whole creation) consists in the pursuit of this supra-mundane reality. The vast majority of people in all generations have been religious realists in this sense. And this majority includes not only the masses but also the most intelligent ones including scientists, philosophers and mystics. However, there have been many

in the modern period who denied religious realism and called themselves atheists. Feuerbach and his followers like Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx are the best examples of atheists. Best contemporary examples are Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett. All of them deny religious realism. For practical purposes, therefore, we shall take “atheism” to mean the denial of religious realism. However, there are difficulties in defining “atheism” in terms of religious anti-realism. An important consideration is that one can be religious realist and still not be a theist; there are various non-theistic ways of being a religious realist. Therefore, let us consider theistic beliefs in more detail. Theists, being religious realists, hold beliefs 1-3:

- (1) there exists a supra-mundane reality that the theists call God
- (2) This reality is said to be utterly different from all other (mundane) reality. Although the technical term for this belief is divine transcendence, there are difficulties in straight away calling it by that term because the term “transcendence” has taken a different connotation today (we shall see this in connection with modern atheism).
- (3) That the ultimate good and happiness (*summum bonum*) of human beings (and the whole of creation) consists in the pursuit of this reality.

Apart from these three beliefs common to all religious realists, theists also hold the following:

- (4) Though utterly different from the objects in this world, this reality is actively involved in this mundane world. This is called divine immanence.
- (5) This mundane reality is God’s creation.
- (6) Theists also hold that this supra-mundane or divine is better spoken of in personal terms than impersonal terms.
- (7) In addition to these beliefs commonly held by theists, monotheists hold that there is only one supra-mundane religious reality.

Since the common usage of the term “atheism” is a denial of monotheism, it would imply the denial of the doctrines 1-7. But strictly speaking the term should not apply to polytheists and therefore, should apply only to those who deny doctrines (1) to (6).

Now let us consider “a-theism”. This is not standard terminology. But when we look at the reality of religious belief in the contemporary world we need some term like this because not all who deny the existence of a theistic deity can be considered atheists and put alongside Marx, Freud, Dawkins and others. Consider, for example, Buddhism and Taoism. Since they do not agree with theists in important respects (such as the personal nature of religious reality) they are sometimes characterized as atheistic religions. But it is not appropriate call them atheists because unlike atheists like Marx, they are not anti-realists regarding religious reality. They agree with the theists not only in the existence of a supra-mundane reality (Tao, Nirvana), but also in the other two beliefs regarding religious realism, i.e., its utter difference from the mundane reality and that the pursuit of this reality is the *summum bonum* (ultimate good or fulfilment) of human existence. But they reject other theistic beliefs. Therefore, rather than call this view “atheism” we shall call it “a-theism”. They are indeed living religions, a-theistic religions.

Denial of the doctrines (2) or (4) leads to two other kinds of “a-theism” called pantheism and deism. Pantheists deny (2), i.e., that God is utterly different from the mundane reality and hold that everything is God. Deists deny the (4), i.e., the belief that God is currently involved in the world. Since the more technical term for the second and fourth beliefs are “transcendence” and “immanence”, theists are those who believe in a deity that is both

transcendent and immanent whereas pantheists deny God's transcendence and deists deny God's immanence. Deism and pantheism too might be called "a-theism" but they would not qualify as "a-theistic religions" like Buddhism and Taoism. Deism and pantheism are best considered as philosophical views *about* religions than the views of any practicing religious believers.

To sum up our definitions, then, atheism is strictly speaking the denial of a religious reality as understood by the theists. It includes denial of the doctrines 1-6. A-theism does not deny 1-3 (religious realism), but might deny any of the other theistic beliefs. A-theism may be religious (as in the case of Buddhism or Taoism) or only a philosophical view regarding religions (like deism). Having seen the differences, we shall focus on the atheism as commonly understood, i.e., as denial of monotheistic beliefs 1-7 and its historical development. But before going into the details of atheism we need to spend some time to clarify some concepts that are closely linked with atheism.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is religious realism?

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2) What are the basic religious convictions of monotheists?

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3) How is atheism differentiated from a-theism?

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1.3 ATHEISM AND ITS COUSINS

There are a number of concepts that are similar in some ways to atheism because of which they are often confused with it. The most used among such concepts are naturalism, materialism, agnosticism, and secularism. Let us consider these.

Naturalism is literally the view that only natural entities exist. A corollary of this view is the denial of the supernatural—either God or spirit—that is independent of the natural but impinges on it (through creation, preservation, provident care, etc.). Thus it is the denial of religious

realism. However, naturalism is a broader term than atheism and can refer to a whole philosophy of life. In the contemporary world with its high premium on science, naturalism has also come to mean the epistemological thesis that science is the only reliable means of knowing. This is epistemological naturalism. This would also imply that the world as explained by scientific laws is all that exists. Besides the metaphysical and epistemological naturalism, there is ethical naturalism which holds that moral life does not require God or such supernatural factors. Apart from such full-fledged naturalism found in the modern world, there have been various naturalistic views in the ancient world such as the *Carvakas* and the *Ajīvikas* of India and those like Democritus and Epicurus in the West.

Materialism is almost identical with the metaphysical component of naturalism (the view that only natural entities exist). It says that matter is the only reality and that everything in the world, including thought, will, and feeling, can be explained in terms of matter. Since it entails a denial of spiritual beings or processes, materialism is typically allied with atheism. Apart from this metaphysical view, materialism has also a derivative sense according to which comfort, pleasure, and wealth are the only or highest goals or values. The Indian *Carvakas* were not only naturalists but also materialists in this sense as they considered pleasure as the ultimate good. While atheism, naturalism and materialism involve definite metaphysical views, agnosticism is a suspension of belief in metaphysical issues. Unlike the atheists who deny the existence of God, agnostics neither affirm nor deny the existence of God; agnostics only say that they have no evidence either for believing or for denying the existence of such metaphysical entities as God, soul etc.

Secularism is another term that often crops up in the vicinity of atheism. This word has a variety of meanings. Coming from the Latin word *saeculum*, originally the word denoted (1) the present world of change. This was contrasted with the religious world that was taken to be eternal. This merely contrastive use of the word would eventually give way to the oppositional meaning where secularism meant (2) an antireligious, atheistic outlook. According to a third meaning “secularism” is not seen in anti-religious terms, but refers to an outlook that limits itself to the world of here and now without any considerations of God or the hereafter. It may be remarked that the word “*lokayata*” (another name used for *Carvakas*) clearly points to this meaning of secularism, as it comes from *lōka*, meaning this world. From this meaning of secularism arises a fourth meaning according to which secularism refers to the autonomy of the political realm from the religious sphere. In the contemporary usage, this fourth meaning is the most prominent, although the others are not absent. This idea of the exclusion of the religious from the political realm takes two different forms. In the west it was seen in terms of the separation of the Church and the state whereas in India with its diversity of living religions secularism is seen in terms of equality before law irrespective of one’s religious belonging.

1.4 VARIETIES OF ATHEISM

Atheism can be classified in different ways depending on the basis of classification. One way to classify it is terms of its relation to life. From this perspective, atheism has been classified into practical and theoretical. When psalmist refers to the “fool” saying in his heart that there is no God (Ps. 53:1), it is worth noting that the “fool” does it only in his or her heart, and not to others. “Fool” in the biblical understanding is the one who puts his trust wealth and possessions and not in God. (Cf. Luke 12:20) This is practical atheism. It refers to a manner of life that is lived as if

God did not exist, but does not bother to talk about it or argue about it. Such practical atheism is contrasted with theoretical atheism that engages in reasoning in an attempt to show that God (or gods) does not exist. In that process, not only did they deny the existence of gods, but also put forward theories to explain the existence of gods. Jan Bremmer credits the ancient Greeks with the discovery of theoretical atheism, which can be considered a necessary corrective to inadequate ways of understanding the divine. For example, if God is conceived to be just like human beings (with all their frailties like lust and jealousy), except that these beings have greater power, then others with greater moral sensibility are bound to criticise such deities. Similarly, if God is identified with natural powers like the sun, any naturalistic attempt to understand the sun is bound to be considered atheistic. Such was the case in ancient Greece. Theoretical atheism of this kind has great value since it performs a therapeutic role by helping future generations to come to a better understanding of the nature of the divine. On the other hand, it has also been dangerous to its protagonists as it offends the sensibilities of the more common believers. It is worth recalling that one of the charges against Socrates, when he was sentenced to death, was that of being an atheist. Thus, “atheism” in the ancient world came to be used more for labelling one’s opponents than any set of beliefs.

A more important distinction is the one between classical or perennial atheism on the one hand, and modern atheism on the other. There are three important distinctions that could be pointed out between them. First, this division, as the name indicates, is based on the chronological factor. Classical atheism—whether practical or theoretical—has a perennial quality about them. Thus, there have always been and there will always be people whose lives are not guided by religious values and considerations; and there will be intensely religious people in every age who criticize the inadequate ways of conceiving God. Modern atheism, on the other hand, is a peculiar development in the cultural history of the West, eventually spreading to other parts of the world. Second, unlike earlier times when “atheist” was a term of insult used for one’s opponents, modern atheists loudly and proudly called themselves atheists. They took it as a badge of honour to be an atheist. This is perhaps the most important feature of modern atheism. Thirdly, modern atheism is both theoretical and practical. It is theoretical in as much as they were passionately involved in giving reasons for their atheism, critiquing the arguments for existence of God, and questioning the very coherence of the idea of God. For this reason, modern atheism is best defined not only as a rejection of theism but as a conscious and reasoned rejection of theism. Modern atheism is also practical in as much as it marks a significant shift in the values that one holds dear. But it should not be thought that modern atheists are immoral persons. There are professed atheists who are as concerned, and perhaps even more concerned, with matters of justice and peace than many believers. What is being said is that the value system of modern culture (and not of individual atheists) is significantly different from that of the religious believers. If the biblical fool is one who relies not on God, but on power and wealth, these are the very foundations of modern culture. Unlike the earlier cultures that did not consider wealth as an end in itself and even considered it antithetical to religious values, modern culture (that is inseparable from the development of capitalism) came to consider the production of wealth as an end in itself. So too, with political power.

Another way of classifying atheism is in terms of procedure and motivation. Seen in these terms, atheism can be divided into critical or philosophical atheism and dogmatic atheism. The former are open-minded intellectuals who seek to promote intellectual honesty in thinking about God, whereas the latter consider theism as a plague to be eradicated and go about doing so with little concern for intellectual engagement with theists. Antony Flew (1923-2010) is an excellent

example of the former whereas Richard Dawkins is an example of the latter. Whereas the former produced a philosophical classic like “Theology and Falsification” the latter’s *God Delusion* is a bestseller that draws a caricature of God and then goes about demolishing it. Dogmatic atheism is an offshoot of modern atheism and is sometimes referred as “New Atheism”.

Philosophical atheism is a form of theoretical atheism that disputes theistic claims. Their chief arguments can be found in David Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. The most important argument is perhaps the argument from evil. The basic argument is that if God is both all powerful and all good, as theists claim, then the quality and quantity of evil and pain seen in this world is inexplicable. Therefore, the believers will be compelled, they say, to withdraw their claim about the existence of God or at least one of the two claims regarding God (being all powerful and being all good). What needs to be noted is that the experience of evil is part of the human condition and theists grapple with it as much as the atheists, and ardent theists have tried to grapple with it for centuries, even before there emerged any cogent argument from evil emerged.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What are the different meanings of the word “secularism”?

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2) Theoretical atheism in the ancient world had a therapeutic value. Explain.

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3) What are the characteristic features of modern atheism that makes it distinct from classical atheism?

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1.5 THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF MODERN ATHEISM

As in the case of any historical event, it would be too simplistic to trace the origins of modern atheism to any single factor. There are philosophical, social, religious, political and economic factors that come together in the emergence of the modern world and modern atheism was one of its offshoots. Our primary focus in this section will be on the philosophical roots of this phenomenon and point out some of the other factors in the next section. Even in looking at the philosophical roots of modern atheism, we shall limit our considerations to the changes in the understanding of transcendence and immanence that lie at the heart of theism.

Since modern atheism is a conscious and reasoned rejection of theism, we must begin with the manner in which moderns understood theism. What we saw in the introduction about our inability to put into human language the experienced reality is at the root of the various ways in which theistic beliefs (1-7) come to be understood. As long as the person who has the experience is involved in the discussions, he or she can steer the conversation in the proper direction. But when the focus shifts from the experience to its doctrinal articulations and the analysis of those articulations by others there is all the likelihood of matters going haywire. Such is the story that we find at the origins of modern atheism.

Consider the belief in transcendence and immanence of God. We have seen it in terms of the utter unlikeness of God with the mundane reality and yet being involved in it. In the theistic understanding, therefore, transcendence and immanence always go together and they are never opposed to each other. But it is not unusual (even standard practice) to define it in terms of outside/inside distinction. The Wikipedia article on transcendence is a good example. It tells us that the first meaning of transcendence is that “God is completely outside of and beyond the world, as contrasted with the notion that God is manifested in the world.” The definition of authors like Peter Berger is hardly different. When the distinction is seen in terms of outside/inside distinction it becomes a logical contradiction to say that God is both immanent and transcendent, as theists do. Apart from the logical problem, there is also the difficulty that God’s involvement in the world seems to go against the autonomy of natural laws. As a matter of fact, David Hume’s definition of divine miracle is in terms of the suspension of natural laws. Deism was the solution found by some of the early modern thinkers to overcome these difficulties. They held that God created the world but does not intervene in it, but lets it run on its own laws, like a wound clock. This solution was surely unacceptable to the theistic believers.

The important question is how the moderns came to understand transcendence and immanence of God in this manner. In order to answer this question we must begin with the realization that western Christian theism (whose womb bore the baby of modern atheism) is a unique combination of Jewish religious insights (filtered through the eyes of Jesus Christ and his early followers) and Greek philosophy. The religious insight of the Jews was that of a religious reality that is utterly unlike the mundane reality. It was so utterly unlike the reality of ordinary human experience that this reality could neither be named nor uttered. Yet, this reality was so closely involved in the lives of the people, especially attentive to the cries of the oppressed. If the former (unlikeness) indicated the transcendence of the divine, the latter (involvement) indicated divine immanence. On the other hand, this immanence, by the very fact of its special inclination towards scum of the earth, is also a manifestation of the utter unlikeness of the values of the divine reality as the Jews understood it. In other words, the Jewish God was both ontologically and morally transcendent to the mundane world, but very much present in it.

Enter Greek philosophy. Neo-Platonism with its utterly transcendent One (that is also the Good), which at the same time gives reality to the things in this world through “participation” fitted the

Jewish (and Christian) understanding of God like hands and gloves. But there was a rub. The Greek One was so other-worldly that it was difficult to see how this One could be considered a Christian God who considered this world so valuable as to send his only son to save it. There comes Aristotle to the rescue. This disciple of Plato had blended the Platonic Ideas with an excellent appreciation of this world in his philosophy. This was adapted by the Christians in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. Everything seemed to go well.

But there was a difficulty. The hinge that connected Aristotle's philosophy of this world with Plato's transcendent world was the arguments that sought to prove the necessity of a First Cause, a Prime Mover, etc., to account for observed change in this world. This hinge proved to be too fragile to hold the weight of the Platonic (and the religious) understanding of transcendence. This will be understood only when we realize that although Aristotle assimilated the Platonic ideas into his own theory of categories, there is a world of difference between the two. Plato's forms and the ultimate Form (One) are utterly different from this world (hence, ontologically transcendent). But the Aristotelian categories are categories of this world. These are organized logically, the ultimate Form being the all-inclusive Form of all forms. In other words, the First Cause to which Aristotle's arguments lead is a logical requirement of his philosophical account of *this world*, a kind of scientific explanation of the time. Thus is lost the Platonic as well as the Jewish notion of transcendence, with no heartburns at all. Unlike Plato's and the Judeo-Christian understanding of this world (as dependent) on a transcendent religious reality for its existence (participation in Plato, creation in Judaism), Aristotle's world is a self-contained system. This comes to be re-enforced during the modern period with the development of Newtonian physics.

In adopting the Aristotelian system, Aquinas was sensitive to the religious notion of transcendence. Therefore, even while adopting Aristotle's argument for existence of God he knew very well that the Christian God could not be a logical requirement of the system, as in Aristotle. This prompted him to smuggle in the Platonic notion of participation such that the utter transcendence of God is maintained. But with the idea of modern science that the world is a gigantic clock that functions on its own, the notion of participation becomes superfluous. To affirm the transcendence of God in a self-regulating world is to think of some entity outside the system; immanence, then, becomes the arbitrary intervention of this external power into the functioning of a mechanical cosmos. When the moderns rejected this notion of God, the Aristotelian-Thomistic type of natural theology had become so well-entrenched that the energies of the modern defenders of theism was expended not in correcting the skewed notion of transcendence and immanence to bring it in line with the religious understanding, but in constructing newer versions of natural theology using the latest findings of science. Michael Buckley's authoritative study, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* gives us a detailed account of these futile attempts. What is typical of these modern arguments is that God is conceived along the lines of a scientific hypothesis. They proceed from some observed features of the world to God as the explanation of those features. Religious thinkers are only beginning to come around to the view that the real force of the arguments for God's existence consists not in their logical force, but in pointing to certain "natural signs" that can function as invitations to religious insights. This is the basic thrust of a recent book by Stephen Evans.

1.6 THE SOCIO-CULTURAL ROOTS OF MODERN ATHEISM

No account of the emergence of modern atheism would make sense apart from its indebtedness to Christendom. "Christendom" is the term used to designate the Christianity that emerged as a

successor to the Roman Empire. Christendom was at once many things. It was a magnificent human achievement that combined within it a delicate balance of temporal power and spiritual dynamism. The architecture of St. Peter's in the Vatican, with its outstretched arms embracing the world is a good symbol of the magnificence of Christendom. It was a unifying power in a fragmented Europe, a multinational spiritual empire of prayer and learning done in its monasteries, and a civilising force among the barbarian chieftains. But it had also a soft underbelly, in as much as it was also the centre of political intrigue and moral degradation.

It was the degradation that became the focus of the Protestant Reformation led by Martin Luther. Its impact was even more traumatic to the Western world than that of the scientific revolution. Whereas the scientific revolution took apart the magnificent intellectual synthesis built by Aquinas on the foundations of Aristotle and Plato, the Protestant Reformation broke up the unity of Christendom as a socio-cultural force. The nationalist urges that were kept under check by the unifying power of Christendom reasserted itself with the Protestants on the side of the nationalists and Catholics on the side of Rome. The European soil was soaked in the blood of martyrs who fought protracted religious wars, creating an anti-religious atmosphere where atheism could sprout among the thinking sections of the population.

The weakening of Roman power enabled the new merchant class to assert its autonomy, with private property and mercantile interests replacing common land and common good. (Earlier such interests were held in check with avarice being condemned as a grievous sin). It was from this bloody mix of religious fervour, nationalist political ambitions and a developing capitalist economy that a group of intelligentsia emerged that proudly proclaimed itself atheistic. Modern atheism was seen as an escape route from religious intolerance and the entry point for building a new world on the foundations of the newly developing physics and economics, aided by the failure of philosophical thinking we saw in 1.5.

1.7 THE FUTURE OF THEISM-ATHEISM DEBATE

Atheistic arguments, we have seen, is always directed against some specific understanding of theism, as we have seen. That understanding is hardly ever in keeping with what believers themselves say. If ancients like Socrates and the early Christians never owned up the accusation of being atheists, the moderns took pride in being atheists. But modern atheism, as we have seen, is the repudiation of a particular historical-cultural development in the understanding of theism that misrepresented the basic theistic conviction regarding immanence and transcendence of God. Thus, theists and atheists seem to be speaking past one another than speaking to each other. Given this situation, does this debate have a future? On the one hand, if we learn from Wittgenstein's idea about the autonomy of language games, it would seem that this debate would have no future unless the legitimate autonomy of religious language game is respected. Vincent Brümmer is among those who consider this debate to be doomed as long as theism is treated as a scientific hypothesis. On the other hand, even if it was a historical mistake to think of God as an explanatory hypothesis along the lines of a scientific hypothesis, in as much as this manner of arguing for God's existence has a long history, the critics are not likely to easily acknowledge this autonomy. Therefore, it is hard to see the debate making any headway.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How does the modern understanding of immanence and transcendence differ from the theistic understanding?

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2) What is the significant difference between the neo-Platonic One and the Aristotelian First Cause?

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3) What were some of the social factors that contributed to the emergence of modern atheism?

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1.8 LET US SUM UP

Atheism is as old as theism stretching from ancient Greeks and the Indian *lokayatas* to the present. It appears in various forms that vary from critiques of some prevalent ways of understanding the divine without denying religious realism (as with different forms of “atheism”), to a complete denial of religious realism in favour of naturalism. But due to various reasons, atheism that remained a term of abuse for centuries became very attractive to many intellectuals of the modern period and its fascination has not waned since. But religious convictions continue to remain strong and it is not likely that the theism-atheism debate is likely to make any headway in the near future, until they learn to listen to one another.

1.9 KEY WORDS

Atheism = a word with many meanings, but for practical purposes, atheism is understood as the denial of religious realism.

Religious realism = the view that (1) there exists a religious or supra-mundane or supra-natural reality that is (2) utterly unlike the objects experienced in our ordinary sense experience. It also holds that (3) the ultimate good of human beings consists in the pursuit of this supra-mundane reality.

Transcendence = the view that divine reality is utterly unlike beyond the ordinary reality of sense-experience. But during the modern period this comes to be understood in spatial terms, i.e., the view that divine reality is outside the cosmos.

Immanence = refers to the presence and activity of the divine reality in this world of ordinary experience.

A-theism = is used for a variety of views like that of Buddhism, that are religious but not theistic.

Deism = a philosophical view that accepts the existence of a creator God, but denies that God intervenes in the affairs of the world after its creation. Seeing divine “transcendence” and “immanence” as a matter of being outside/inside the created world, they deny divine immanence.

Pantheism = is the counterpart of deism. They too understand transcendence and immanence in spatial terms and go on to deny God’s transcendence while affirming divine immanence.

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UNIT 2 DEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

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- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Key Words
- 2.8 Further Readings and References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to introduce, Deism and Agnosticism, two key concepts from the world of philosophy of Religion. Since it is not possible to give a complete and exhaustive account of these two concepts within such a limited space, the chapter aims at laying a foundation of the concepts which can be built up later by further reading. The chapter looks not only at the Historical aspect of the two concepts but also examines their meaning and significance in the realm of Religion and further dives deep into the Philosophical implications of the same. Apart from looking into the two concepts separately there will be an attempt to see them in the light of each other. Deism and Agnosticism fall into many of the theories which have tried to explain the relation of the Creator and His creation. Agnosticism is concerned with the possibility of the knowledge of the Creator if any such exists at all. Therefore an examination of these concepts in the light of the other theories, in the larger philosophical canvas, is another objective of the study. The chapter ends with a reflection on the relevance of the concepts in the present context and their implications in the other domains of Philosophy of Religion.

Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- to have basic understandings of Deism;
- to differentiate Deism from other forms of theism;
- to relate it with the development of modern science ;
- to understand the basic idea of Agnosticism and its varieties;
- to differentiate and relate Agnosticism and Atheism .

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Deism is one of those theories which tries to explain the relation of God as a creator with His creation. For this purpose they resort to the observation of nature and natural phenomena in stead

of taking refuge in any canonical literature of any Religion. This is a view which maintains that though God has created this Universe, He does not exercise incessant control over it. As a matter of fact, He does not intervene in any affair of this world. He configured some laws into nature while constructing this multiple world of objects and has left this world in the supervision of those natural laws. Pierre Viret, a French thinker, probably used the term *deist* for the first time in 1564. Deism flourished primarily in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth century due to advent of modern science. Science challenged the theories of religion and new interpretations of religious facts were in demand. The ideas of supernatural revelations were rejected as science started identifying certain laws of nature. Later it spread to France, Ireland, North America etc. and as a whole exercised deep influence in shaping modern world. Agnosticism, on the other hand, has its genesis in scepticism. Sceptics maintain that apart from mathematical propositions and certain tautologies all other knowledge claims are loaded with doubt. They are certain only up to a degree. Nothing is absolutely certain. Extending this logic to the matters of religion and faith, Agnostics maintain that nothing in that realm can be said with certainty. They do not claim to be theists as they think that they can't prove the existence of God and also desist from claiming themselves to be atheists since they opine that they can't disprove it either. Though this line of thought can be traced both in ancient Indian and Western traditions, the term Agnosticism was coined by Thomas Henry Huxley in the year 1869.

2.2 DEISM – ITS ORIGIN AND DEFINITION

Deism has its etymological origin in the word 'Deus', a word, which stands for God in Latin. In the realm of Philosophy of Religion, Deism is mainly concerned with the relationship between the Creator and his Creation. Chronologically this stream of thought can be traced to have its genesis in the Seventeenth century's Europe. Being a part of the scientific revolution, it seems to have left its mark even in the eighteenth century's enlightenment period. And therefore we can read definite contribution of this theory in shaping the thoughts of modern times. Deism is neither atheism nor any kind of scepticism. It attempted to find a way between religious dogmatism and extreme scepticism. But Deism is not found as a uniform philosophy throughout seventeenth and eighteenth century as it included a range of people from anti-Christian to un-Christian theists.

Deism primarily maintains that though God has created the world but He does not interfere in the activities of the same. The world functions according to certain laws which of course He structured when He brought all these into being. God is thus wholly transcendent and not at all immanent. Deists advocate observation of natural phenomena and their rational analysis as a means to know God. There is no scope of revelation or mysticism in Deism. Due to the absence of controlling powers in God, though the aboriginal allotment of powers is assigned to Him, Deism comes very close to Naturalism. Because in Naturalistic Philosophy, it is the Nature which practically bears the supreme power and governs everything. But Deism is neither synonymous with Atheism in the sense that they do not deny in the presence of a Supreme power nor is it synonymous with theism as they don't accept the participation of that power, as theists do, in controlling the activities of this Universe. God endowed the world at creation with self-sustaining and self-acting powers and then abandoned it to the operation of these powers acting as second causes.

Pierre Viret, a French thinker, probably used the term *deist* for the first time in 1564, in *Instruction Chrétienne en la doctrine de la foi et de l'Évangile (Christian teaching on the doctrine of faith and the Gospel)*. He opines that Deism denotes a line of thought which does accept the existence of God even as a creator of heaven and earth, but they reject all that is described in the Theology and Mythology of Christianity as tales and parables.

In England, the term *deist* first appeared in the year 1621 in Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Lord Herbert of Cherbury, generally considered the 'father of English Deism', enumerated the first articulated form of Deism in his book *De Veritate* in 1624. It proposes a theory of knowledge based upon the recognition of the innate universal characteristics of the perceived objects and completely rejects any epistemology pertaining to anything supernatural in its origin and determinable in only by strife and conflict. Matthew Tindal, an eminent English Deist, wrote *Christianity as Old as the Creation or the gospel a republication of the Religion of Nature* in 1730, which is the first standard text – book of the Deism, later came to be known as 'The Bible' of the school. It became popular because almost every argument, quotations and issues raised for decades can be found here. Later Deism spread to France, notably through the work of Voltaire, to Germany, and to America.

2.3 DEISM – VARIOUS FACETS

The roots of Deism can be traced to the Heraclitan conception of Logos. Logos is the supreme principle for him and he was "both willing and unwilling to call it Zeus (God)". Demiurge, the terminology used by Plato for God, comes very close to Deist's depiction of the Supreme as a Craftsman. However, the word 'deism', as it is understood today, is generally used to refer to the movement toward Natural Theology or freethinking that occurred in Seventeenth – century Europe, and specifically in England. One needs to study this shift to Natural Theology in order to understand the foundations of Deism.

There was a radical change in the outlook of seventeenth common minds in whole western world due to the advent of Science. The whole geo – centric biblical theory was challenged with the Copernican revolution. The works of Kepler and Galileo added to the paradigm shift. This reduced Bible to a text on faith and morality and took its authority away from the world of nature and Natural Laws. Issac Newton explained natural movements with the help of his laws motions and the principle of gravitation. The idea of certain natural laws governing the universe dominated the knowledge domain. This, in turn suggested a theory in Theology that though God created the world, He left it in the hand of nature which governs its movements with its own set of laws. The explanations of various natural phenomena challenged the idea of miracle which was highly glorified by religion. In addition, the study of classical literature led to the conclusion that some of the documents didn't have the required veracity to be relied for even the issues of faith. These gave birth to a series of biblical criticisms by rational thinkers.

Thus the whole of Deism can be put as an acceptance of God but rejection of His incessant control over his own creation. Now though there are general agreements among the Deists regarding the basics of Deist Philosophy, there are differences as well. For example a class of Deists resort to the classical Christian view that God will punish or reward us for our activities after our death whereas some maintain that we face the consequence of our actions in this life

during our existence in this world only. All deists did not come out of the ambit of Christianity though they were all critical of it. Classical Deists like Matthew Tindal continued regard Jesus as a great moral teacher though he was opposed to the ascription of Divinity to him. They regarded themselves as the representatives of the classical and pure form of Christianity which had existed before getting corrupt in the hands of certain dogmatists by the addition of mysterious concepts.

All Deists had both critical but constructive approaches in their Philosophies. All wanted to build a solid philosophical base for the guidance of human activities through elimination of irrational elements of religious dogmatism. Some targeted the priestly class in their writings, some focussed on re – reading of the religious scriptures and some subscribed to the study of nature. This is the reason why Deism, like atheism and freethinking, was one of the unpalatable terms for a large section of the English society. Deism was equated with Atheism, though most of the Deists agreed, in many basic propositions, with the orthodox school. Thus Deism was a judicious mixture of both critical and constructive thinking. They allowed the wind of freethinking to blow openly, but resisted it from blowing strong enough to extinguish their faith in a Creator and His primordial power to create this Universe.

Now for the Deists, reason was the most pivotal instrument in understanding the laws of nature and their subsequent implications. Rational faculty refers to the ability of inferring, judging and apprehending. Reasoning is about agreement or disagreement of ideas. Affirmation or denial of agreement gives rise to the propositions. Knowledge occurs through this adventure of ideas. But Deists, apart from accepting reason and rationality also do entertain certain truths to be self evident. Though it does not indicate any sorts of divine revelation, it is accommodated by some terminologies like intuitive knowledge.

Deists accept something called the ‘the light of nature’ to support the self-evident nature of their positive religious claims. Deists derive the sets of their duties and practices by comparing the perfect nature of Divine and imperfect nature of themselves. The acceptance of the existence of a Divine being is based on what they call ‘the light of nature’. God is a Being who is Absolute perfection and Absolute bliss in himself. He is the genesis of this multiple objects of the universe.

But this concept of ‘Light of Nature’ did not stop them from critically engaging with the ideas in the realm of religion. No nonsense was entertained in the garb of intuition. Orthodox Christianity tried to depict itself as a product of a series of miracles. People were told to accept religious ideas with faith which they could not apprehend. Mysteries were treated as something beyond reason and not necessarily contradictory to it. But most of the Deists opposed this idea and relied on reason for certitude. The idea of ‘Self evident Truth’ did not support the concept of Revelation. They wanted to get the religion rid of the mysteries.

The reason and rationality must be incessantly at work and question things as far as possible. In case of conflict between reason and faith, it is reason that has to exercise to the farthest extent. Though it is taught that one needs to accept that which is not intellectually comprehensible with faith, Deists maintain that we can’t make ourselves a subject of any cock and bull story for the sake of this so called faith. They are not ready to accept evident contradictions like yellow and blue colours of the same object at the same time without questioning it. The veracity of any

religious dictum is always subject of revision and appraisal. So the older understanding that children dying before baptism do not go to heaven but are headed for some other world has no significance in Deist thinking. Deists opine that a lot of things, which are asserted to be essential for salvation, can't be entertained by a rational mind. They are just absurd or appear to be simply laughing stocks. These apparent contradictions of holiness on one side and absurdity on the other lead a rational thinking mind to a zone of utter confusion. Apart from that, even understanding these expositions as symbolism is not easy in the sense that there has been a variety of interpretations to these stories. What do they really signify remains still shrouded in mystery.

Deists, due to their proximity to Naturalism, move towards cosmological argument. According to this argument, everything in nature is designed in such a way that it can survive in the world. Certain animals are full of feathers for the protection from heat and cold. Birds have been gifted with wings so as to fly high. Carnivorous animals have been equipped with sharp nails and specific design of teeth so as to be able to prey and get food. Innumerable such examples can be sighted from the observation of nature. The presence of design in every part of it indicates the presence of designer as well. This designer is none but God. There is substantial ground to infer the presence of a super creative power from the flawless natural system that makes life possible on this earth.

Deism was not untouched by the age old problem of freedom and determinism. Does the emphasis on design argument and conception of natural laws lead us necessarily to some kind of determinism was a pivotal question of the time. The influence of modern science and specially that of Newtonian mechanics, describing the whole cosmos more or less like a machine led to the tendencies of determinism.

Deists had different opinion on soul and life after death. Some like Lord Herbert of Cherbury and William Wollaston opined that soul exists after death and, as per Classical Christianity is rewarded or punished by God. Some like Benjamin Franklin believed in the theory of rebirth and some like Thomas Paine were agnostic in this regard. Yet people like Anthony Collins, Thomas Chubb and Peter Annet were perfect materialists and denied any such possibility of afterlife.

Deists treated the prevailing form of the religion as a perverted form of a simple and rational religion. They ascribed the whole deformation to something called 'priestcraft' or manipulation of the religion by the priests. Common man was misled by the story of heaven and hell and the religion was mystified with unnecessary elements. This deviation required some kind of reformation and Deism was a product of the necessity.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How do Deists relate God and His Creation in their Philosophy?

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2) Did modern science make any impact in the development of Deism?

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3) What do you mean by 'Light of Nature' in Deism?

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2.4 AGNOSTICISM – ITS ORIGIN AND DEFINITION

Agnosticism comes from agnostic which has its roots in Greek *α* (ἄ) meaning without and *gnōsis* (γνῶσις) meaning knowledge. This term was first used by Thomas Henry Huxley. Initially it was used for the rejection of any kind of transcendental knowledge but later it acquired a broader shape and came to be treated as a method of philosophizing and examining the veracity of knowledge claims. Though agnosticism has been often identified with atheism, it actually is not so. There are people who claim themselves both as theists and agnostic whereas there is another group who call themselves both atheist and agnostic. Therefore Thomas Henry Huxley defines it as rejection of conclusions that are not 'demonstrated and demonstrable'.

Sceptic Philosophers believed that apart from some mathematical propositions like 'The sum of all the three angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles' and certain propositions like 'All bachelors are unmarried', which are necessarily true by their definitions themselves, all other propositions regarding the world is associated, as far as its truth – value is concerned, with a degree of probability. They have raised serious doubts about the necessity of Universal propositions like 'All men are mortal'. Therefore there is no basis for a perfect knowledge claim. All knowledge that we claim to have is actually not knowledge but belief. Everything is attached to uncertainty and therefore, while making knowledge claims, we should be very careful. Thus Agnosticism is scepticism but it is special in the sense that it talks mainly about those propositions which are concerned with the existence and nature of God or Absolute reality. Though this is how Agnosticism is defined in the broadest terms, there are various kinds of Agnosticisms which we will see in the due course of the chapter.

2.5. AGNOSTICISM – VARIOUS DIMENSIONS

Though Thomas Henry Huxley used the term agnosticism for the first time, he is not the first and foremost to think in this line. In various cultures and philosophies we find traces of agnosticism in various forms and ways. In Indian tradition, for example, its presence can be traced to the hymns of the Rg Vedas, which is supposed to be the oldest canonical work available in any religion in this world. The Nasadiya Sūkta reads that there was neither 'being nor not being' in the beginning of this creation. And further goes to ask who the creator, is then, of this creation? It reads as –

At first there was neither being nor non – being

There was not air nor yet sky beyond

What was its wrapping? Where? In whose protection?

Was water there unfathomable and deep?

This indicates a kind of unknowability of the Ultimate principle and an antifoundationalistic approach at least in the realm of reason. The same kind of indications can be found in the writings of [Pyrrho](#) in ancient Greek Philosophy. Protagoras also took the sceptical position by declaring ‘Man is the measure of all things’.

In modern times, Kant becomes a champion of the limitations of human reason. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant maintains that the world of objects is given to us in a specific space – time background. All that we know about objects is only one face of it. Kant calls it phenomena and the whole of the object or ‘the thing – in – itself’ is called noumena. This noumena is called unknown and unknowable by Kant. He opines that when reason tries get into the domain of noumena it gets bogged up in its internal contradictions what Kant terms as ‘antinomies’. This sceptical approach indicated by the phrase ‘unknown and unknowable’ perhaps puts Kant also in the zone of agnostics. Apart from that, Kant criticized all the classical arguments for the existence of God, suggesting that intellectual adventures do not work in the region of God. Kant leaves room for faith in the matters of God. This is perfect intellectual agnosticism. Again while reading modern existentialists like Soren Kirkegard, we can listen to the echoes of agnosticism. He maintains that God, if by very definition is unknown, leads us to lot of confusion. If He does not exist, it is impossible to prove His existence and if He does, it is folly to attempt it.

Coming to some classical agnostics, Thomas Henry Huxley, who coined the term agnosticism, very simply puts it as he can neither affirm nor deny the immortality of man. He sees no reason for believing it but on the other hand has no means of disproving it. Like an open thinker, he opines that he has no *a priori* objection to the belief in the after – life but he is not ready to accept them unless they are evidentially proved. In the same tune, Bertrand Russell goes to express his agnosticism. He says that, in the strict philosophical language, he would like to call himself an agnostic rather than an atheist because as he can’t prove the existence of God, he can’t disprove it either.

Agnosticism, though seen as something uniform, actually has got many varieties. One of them is agnostic atheism. This group of people do not believe in the existence of a God but at the same time do not claim to have evidences to demonstrate God’s non – existence. The second group is called agnostic theists. This group believes in the existence of God but does not claim to know it. The third group believes in pragmatic agnosticism, according to which, there is no proof of either existence or non – existence of God. The question is only formal in the sense that the so called God seems to be totally indifferent to the activities of the world. There is another group called Ignostics, who question the definition of God itself before entering into the debate of His existence and non – existence. They opine that the whole debate is meaningless because the very existence of a deity is not empirically verifiable.

Then there is another division of agnosticism, pertaining to unknowability of God. One group thinks that it is absolutely impossible to know the existence of God another maintains that though it is unknowable today one day humanity might come to know about it through certain evidences. The first group is called strong agnostics and the second group is called weak agnostics.

Though Agnosticism seems to be appealing at times, this line of thought has been subject of a variety of criticisms. Many religious scholars are of the opinion that there is a spiritual aspect in human intelligence which makes it capable of conceiving the supra – sensuous reality. They are of the opinion that mere inability to grasp something does not prove its non – existence. The truth might not be revealed to larger section of humanity. But we can't decide the truth value of a proposition based on the number of people who are aware of it.

Agnostics are not ready to affirm the existence of God since there is no sufficient scientific evidence or empirical data to prove it. But religious scholars object that to make or even to expect God to come down and become a subject of laboratory experiment is not sensible. If the possibility of God's existence is not rejected by agnostics, they should also accept the fact that if any such Divine being exists, he can't be like a mixture of certain chemicals in the Chemistry laboratory. Thus the matter of God has to be treated in a different perspective altogether. By definition God transcends the limits of human reason and the world of sense – objects.

Again, Kant's position that the ultimate truth is 'unknown and unknowable' applies only to the realm of reason and rationality. Kant himself maintains that he has kept room for faith in order to deal with God. Therefore, it is a mistake to mix the truths of the sense – data world to mix with the truths of religion.

Another group of theistic scholars argue that it is practically not possible for any human being to go through his life without either being a theist or an atheist. One can't leave this pivotal question like this. A common man's values are dependent on his orientation towards the Ultimate reality, which religion identifies as God. To leave the matter undecided would again amount, they argue, more or less to atheism.

It is better to call oneself an atheist, atheists remark, rather than an agnostic if, like strong agnostics, one maintains that God, even if He exists, is unknown and unknowable. These two positions are practically synonymous. So, strong agnosticism boils down to atheism.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Differentiate between weak and strong agnosticism.

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2) Is agnosticism synonymous with atheism? Give at least a reason for your answer.

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3) Give one criticism of agnosticism as a philosophy.

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2.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have tried to give an outline view of both Deism and Agnosticism. The concepts have been seen from both historical and Philosophical standpoints. Keeping in mind, the varieties which these two concepts encompass, we have tried to throw light on as many of them as possible. To be precise Deism is an evolute of the impact of science upon human mind. Though this theory also can't explain the phenomenal universe and its relation to its creator perfectly, it attempts to come out of the tendency to accept every religious dictum without questioning. That's probably the reason why they are not ready to accept revelation as an epistemological category and appeals to the court of reason and peeps into nature for certainty of knowledge. Similarly agnostic maintain a distinct position with respect to the religious matters like soul and God and very clearly accepts their limitations in knowing those things. Here we have also highlighted its difference with atheism.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Theism and Atheism: Two views, of which, the former affirms belief in God and the later denies it.

Determinism and Indeterminism: The former view holds that all the events are predetermined whereas the later contends that nothing is predestined

A priori: Existing in the mind, prior to and independent of experience

2.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 3 MATERIALISM AND MARXISM

Contents

- 3.0 Objective
- 3.1 Introduction to Materialism
- 3.2 Materialism in Ancient Philosophy
- 3.3 Materialism in Modern Philosophy
- 3.4 Materialism and Marxian Philosophy
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Further Readings and References

3.0. OBJECTIVES

Materialism is one of the most fascinating enquires in the history of ideas. Objective of this Unit is to provide a thorough historical and philosophical introduction to different materialist schools and their culmination in Marxian Materialism, which is known as Dialectical Materialism. The materialist world view had reached its zenith in the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. In this Unit, the continuum of materialist philosophy from antiquity to Marx is presented. (Whenever the words *Marx* or *Marxian* are used, they also imply the contributions of Engels, who had played an indiscernible role in development of Dialectical Materialism. However, Engels urged that their philosophy should be named after Marx, hence the name has been Marxian.)

As the title of the Unit suggests, Marxian Materialism is discussed at length, partially its applications in the analysis of history, society and political economy. It is impossible to furnish all the details pertinent Dialectical Materialism in this Unit. Hence adequate directions and list of primary and secondary writings, in References and Further Readings section, are provided for assisting students for further studies on this topic.

By the time of completion of this Unit, you should have a fair idea of -

- Materialism and idealism, basic differences,
- Materialism in ancient civilizations,
- Materialism in modern philosophy, especially in Marxian philosophy.

3.1. INTRODUCTION TO MATERIALISM

Materialism is a school of thought which holds the matter being the only existing substance and all worldly phenomena including those of thought and consciousness are results of interactions of different forms of the mater. The word 'materialism' first used by the mystical philosopher English Henry More in 1668. And a little later German philosopher Leibniz used it in one of his

French works to name the thought of those who accept the existence of matter alone. Materialism has been the anti-thesis to Idealism which holds the consciousness, not matter, as the ground of all the existence.

The major postulations of Idealism are:

1. Material world is dependent on the spiritual world,
2. Spirit, mind or idea can and does exist independent of matter,
3. An unknowable realm exists beyond the human perception, experience and science.

The origin of Materialism was a challenge to Idealism and the basic postulations of Materialism are as following:

1. World is its by very nature material; everything which exists come into being on the basis of material causes, arises and develops in accordance with the laws of motion of matter,
2. Mater is an objective reality existing outside and independent of the mind and every idea is a product of psychological process about the material phenomena,
3. World and its laws are fully knowable. Much may not be known as of now; however, there is nothing, which cannot be known due to its defined nature. In such cases the 'unknown' cannot be known to those who declared its existence.

Materialism shares affinities with science and Atheism, like the Idealism does with theology and religion. However, they cannot be as the former primarily interested in the truism of independent existence of the world by providing scientific and philosophical explanations of the phenomena, the latter stands for the primacy of human world and nonexistence of god. Another major difference, a historical one, is - all the atheists were materialists, but all the materialists were not atheists. Though there had been materialist thinkers who were against non-sensual knowledge and god, many others did not refute the god due to different reasons.

3.2 MATERIALISM IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

Idealist theories of the world origination were challenged as early as in 8th century BC. German philosopher Karl Jaspers observes that during the period between 800 BC. and 200 BC., which he called 'the Axial Age', similar revolutionary thinking appeared across the major world civilisations in the Middle East, India, China and the Occident, which had laid foundations for future religion, science and philosophy.⁴ All the ancient materialists - Carvakas and Vaisesikas in ancient India, Xun Zi and Wang Chung in ancient China and pre-Socratic philosophers in ancient Greece, who belonged this Age had built sound arguments in favour of Materialism. The subject matters dealt by them were including - the origin or the universe and human beings, relationship between human beings and the god and *vice versa*, human beings and social relationships and different sciences of the natural phenomena. In this section, the Materialism of ancient India and Greece, which had direct influence on modern Materialism are discussed.

Materialism in Ancient India and Greece

In ancient India, Carvaka and Vaisheshika schools of thought had produced significant materialist explanations of the natural phenomena. Carvaka or Lokayata school declares that the nature is made up of four elements earth, water, fire and air and these elements alone, when transformed into the body, intelligence is produced, just as the inebriating power is developed from the blend of certain ingredients; and when these are destroyed, intelligence at once perishes also. The Vaisheshika is said to be the one of the first schools of thought that pronounced atomic theory in the history of ideas, in and around 2nd century B.C. Its founder Kashyapa, who was also called Kanada, propagated the atomic theory which held that the world is made up of *Paramanus* (atoms), which were indestructible particles of matter. While the Carvakas forecasted the major themes of modern science and rational agency of human being, Vaishesikas proposed the scientific theories which were later known as the law of conservation of matter and energy and Newton's law of universal gravitation.

The pre-Socratic Greek thought was a wonderful anthology on natural philosophy, which Aristotle called 'the physical school of thought'. The pre-Socratic thinkers believed that ultimate principle (*archê*) of the Being was one and made up of matter (*hulê*). They sought to determine the origin and nature of everything by identifying the most basic material element, that from which all things emerge and return. Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Anaxagoras, Heraclitus, Epicurus and Democritus were the major thinkers of Greek Materialism, who made extensive work on natural philosophy. While Thales, Anaximenes, Heraclitus held water, air and fire to be the *archê*; Anaximander and Anaxagoras held *Apeiron* (Infinite) and *Nous* (Mind) to be the ultimate principle, respectively. Heraclitus explained the phenomena of the world through his theory of flux. Leucippus, Democritus and Epicurus developed atomic theories, which had similar structures with that of modern physics, to explain the ultimate principle. These philosophers made important contributions to growth of ancient science by providing materialist explanations for quite a few of the natural phenomena. Greek Materialism enjoyed enormous influence over the Western thought. French and English Materialism were always closely related to *Democritus* and *Epicurus*. Francis Bacon, who rivals with René Descartes for the status of the Father of modern philosophy, held the Greek thinkers with high regard and Marx had acquired his foundational knowledge in Materialism from the ideas of Epicurus and Democritus, thus Greek Materialism bears an indelible mark on the development of modern Materialism.

3.3 MATERIALISM IN MODERN PHILOSOPHY

The pre-Marxian Materialism consists of three major schools - the English, French and German. While English school was developed majestic thinkers Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, French schools was developed by physicists Le Roy, Pierre Jean George Cabanis and La Mettrie, who based their arguments on the physics, not metaphysics, of Descartes. The ideas of German philosophers George Wilhelm Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach prepared the foreground for Marxian Materialism. A survey of these schools would present a coherent idea about development of modern Materialism. It also narrates the history of the growth of Dialectical Materialism, since Marx and Engels had studied the works of their predecessors, in order to accept or refute their cases for materialism.

The English School

Karl Marx holds Great Britain to be the original home of all modern Materialism and Materialism as her born son. Bacon was the foremost thinker in the British Materialism, whom Marx described as the 'real progenitor of English Materialism'. For Bacon, natural philosophy is the only true philosophy and physics, which is based on sense experience, is its chief component. Sense perception is the 'Rational Method' of investigation and 1) Induction, 2) Analysis, 3) Comparison, 4) Observation and 5) Experiment are its principal forms. However, Bacon's use of theology in developing his case for Materialism had given rise to a few inconsistencies, which were later addressed by Hobbes who systematized Bacon's ideas.

Hobbes shattered the theological prejudices of Baconian Materialism and brought out extensive arguments in favour of Bacon's Rational Method. He argues that, "It is impossible to separate thought from matter that thinks. This matter is the substratum of all changes going on in the world." However, he could not supply the proof for the fundamental postulation of the Method i.e. all the human knowledge originates from the world of sensation.

It was Locke who substantiated this postulation in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke refuted Descartes' theory of innate ideas which holds the reason as the prime cause of the human knowledge. He described mind as a *tabula rasa* – a white paper, upon which the Nature writes. He classified all the ideas into 'ideas of sense' and 'ideas of reflection'; and the latter are the mind's reflection upon its own activity. Locke's distinction of the ideas suggests how the sense experience supplies primary data for the knowledge, upon which the reason can work. Thus he substantiated Bacon's postulation of rational method.

The major limitation of English Materialism was it dealt only with the problems of epistemology. Engels described this limitation as an inevitable one imposed by the time, which was its strength and weakness at the same time. It was a strength since it had represented the scientific progress of the time and it was the weakness on the other hand as it led to growth of mechanistic Materialism, an incomplete version of modern materialism.

The French School

French Materialism, according to Marx, added societal dimension to English Materialism. The French school was a revolt against 17th century philosophy, which was full of theological and metaphysical speculations. The school was influenced by three strands of thought – physics of Descartes, English Materialism, particularly Locke's epistemology, and the opposition of Pierre Bayle's Materialism to 17th century metaphysics of Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche and Leibniz. This school could be further classified into a) mechanistic and b) socialistic variants.

While the former was inspired by Descartes' physics, the latter had grown out of Locke's epistemology. Their growth was organic and cannot be easily separated. The mechanistic school began with physician Le Roy who was inspired by Descartes' physics, which had endowed matter with self-creative power and conceived mechanical motion as its manifestation. He declared that soul was modus of the body and ideas were mechanical motions. This development

was followed by another physician La Mettrie and reached its zenith in Cabanis, who perfected Cartesian Materialism in his treatise *Rapport du physique et du moral de l'homme*. This school gradually merged in the development of French natural science.

The socialistic school was developed by Claude Adrien Helvétius, a French philosopher. However, this socialism must not be identified with much advanced and polemical Marxian and non-Marxian variants of socialism of 19th and 20th century. Socialism in its initial forms was a theory about how the societal processes including governance shall be conducted by considering all the human beings equally. Helvétius, who had his philosophical roots in Locke's Materialism, extended the latter's epistemological arguments to social life. He argued that, "Man is not wicked, but he is subordinate to his interests. One must not therefore complain of the wickedness of man but of the ignorance of the legislators, who have always placed the particular interest in opposition to the general interest." He presupposed the equality of the human agency based on the Natural equality of human intelligence. This socialistic trend was further developed by Charles Fourier and other forerunners of socialism, whom Marx called utopian socialists. French Materialism developed English materialist theory of epistemology into a social theory and Marx and Engels had considered it above the English one.

The German School

Interestingly in Germany the precursors of Marxian Materialism were not materialists. It was the major idealist philosopher Hegel who developed foundations for Marxian Materialism, unintentionally though. He had created a metaphysical kingdom, which inherited all the previous developments of metaphysics. With this new system, he explained every major social phenomenon of his time. Engels noted that Hegelian system had covered "an incomparably greater domain than any earlier system...logic, natural philosophy, philosophy of mind...philosophy of history, of right, of religion, history of philosophy, aesthetics, etc. — in all these different historical fields Hegel labored to discover and demonstrate the pervading thread of development." Despite their opposition to idealism, Engels equated development of Hegel's system, as part of the growth of German idealism, with political revolution in France in 18th century, which was openly combating against all official science, the church and the state.

According to Hegel's metaphysics, the *Spirit* or *Geist* exists ever since the eternity and it has been the actual living soul of all existence. Through different preliminary stages, it develops its own self. It alienates itself by turning itself into nature, where, *unconscious* of itself, disguised as a *natural necessity*. It goes through further process and reappears as man's consciousness, the subjective spirit. The subjective spirit further alienates itself in order to become objective spirit of the human societies and finally. It arrives at its fullest realization as Absolute Spirit in Hegel's system. According to him, the Geist underwent all such changes due to the dialectic laws of eternal process of Being and Becoming and further negation, to which all objective world and phenomena are subjected to.

Hegelian system has two major aspects to it: a) the *system*, which was world view of speculative metaphysics, and b) the *dialectical method*, which does not allow the existence of any *status quo*. Those who were politically and religiously conservative, including Hegel himself, emphasised much on the *system* and those who regarded the *dialectical method* as important formed the

extreme opposition, the left Hegelian group. Thus, the supposed to be most conservative metaphysical system, which was the official philosophy of Prussian state indeed had a revolutionary element in it. With his dialectical method, Hegel made every thing in existence, including his own philosophy, a subject of Becoming and further negation. This trait was first discovered by the German poet Henrich Heine.

Bruno Bauer, Max Stirner, David Strauss and Ludwig Feuerbach, who represented the left wing of the Hegelian philosophy, had produced radical critiques of Christianity and arguments for materialism. Feuerbach's contribution, which influenced Marx and Engels in significant manner, was particularly outstanding. Feuerbach appreciated Hegel's explanations of societal phenomena such as religion, nation state, but refuted his abstract reasoning such as origin of Absolute Spirit. He declared that it was the nature which is basis for human relationships, not any 'abstract Idea' declared by Hegel. He criticised the existing philosophy becoming mouthpiece for theology. He elaborated his system thought in the form of anthropological Materialism, which was based on the relationship between humans and nature. Marx saw the successes of Feuerbach's in the following arguments:

a) He had shown that philosophy was nothing more than religion brought into thought and developed in thought, and that it is equally to be condemned as another form and mode of existence of the estrangement of man's nature.

b) He had founded *true Materialism* and *real science* by making the social relation of "man to man" the basic principle of this theory.

c) He had opposed to the third step negation of the negation of Hegelian dialectic, which claims to be the absolute positive, the positive which is based upon itself and positively grounded in itself, which can be proved. Marx and Engels were initially inspired by the left Hegelians, particularly by Feuerbachian attack. Feuerbach was a vital link between Hegel and Marx. However, later they realised that the latter had fallen short of providing accurate arguments to counter the prevailing idealist philosophy. Hence they had retained the progressive parts and severely critiqued the overall arguments of the left Hegelians. Feuerbach was their major point of departure. Following are the three major limitations of Feuerbach's materialism, according to Marx and Engels.

a) Approach of Feuerbachian materialism was ahistorical. He attacked Hegel's idealist system stating that nothing could possibly exist outside the nature and man, however, he had not recognised the importance of human history, which was completely absent in his works. Hence, he could not refute the Hegel's idealist scheme of history i.e. the history of the Geist.

b) The second major limitation was his philosophy of religion, which holds that religion is the relation between human beings based on the affections, particularly between the two sexes and...in the love between "I" and "Thou". This forced association of human relations with the religion necessitates human relations to be conceived of as the new, true, religion.

c) The third limitation was Feuerbach had continued to cling to abstract thought in some form or other in his writings and could not base on concrete social and historical categories.

Marxian materialist system, which developed upon the well-built aspects of hitherto Materialism and inference of the modern science, included a philosophy of nature, a theory of history and a theory of society, all three derived from a common set of first principles and logically supporting each other.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What was Bacon's Rational Method and how Locke substantiated it?

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2) What was the major difference between the English Materialism and the French Materialism?

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3.4 MATERIALISM AND MARXIAN PHILOSOPHY

Marxian arguments marked the fullest materialist shift in Hegelian philosophy and also developed disarming materialist arguments. Until the Marxian intervention, Materialism was not an argument with force against religion, which continued to resurface in materialist thought in some form or the other. Engels said, "The materialist outlook was taken really seriously for the first time and carried through consistently", only in Marxism. It denied the Idealism the status of philosophy and equated it with theology. Marx acknowledged the successes of Feuerbach in establishing the hitherto philosophy being the encroachment of religion in thought expressed this idea. (Here philosophy must be understood for metaphysical part of it.) According to Marx, Idealism was not just an abstract theory of world view in philosophy, but a method of interpretation of every question of human existence, thus it was much direct confrontation.

Incorporation of Dialectical Method into materialist analysis made it a much cogent theory. Dialectical method is an approach to understand the phenomena of nature, which holds that all the things, processes and phenomena are in motion and undergo a constant change. Initially it was developed by Hegel in his Idealist system (Refer to 'revolutionary element' discovered by Henrich Heine in previous section) and given materialist form by Marx. The method essentially maintains that 'Being' of any idea, object or phenomena in its process of 'Becoming' creates its 'own other' and get 'negated' by it. Again this 'negation will be negated' to pave way to new Being. For example, the inhumane capitalism (Being) during the time of industrial revolution (in its Becoming) created its own other 'the revolutionary proletariat' and got 'negated' by it

(Negation). However, it could survive by several gradual conversions; most of them forced and some were natural. The new forms of capitalism such as capitalism + welfare negated the need for revolutionary attitude among the proletariat (Negation of the Negation). Thus, the new Being of Capitalism was possible. This method is applicable to all materialist phenomena and processes, according to Marx.

The words 'Dialectical Materialism' and 'Historical Materialism' were not used by Marx and Engels, but later created by later Marxian thinkers. Stalin said, "Our philosophy is called Dialectical Materialism because its approach to the phenomena of nature, its method of apprehending them, is dialectical, while its interpretation of the phenomena of nature, its conception of these phenomena, its theory, is Materialism". Historical Materialism is the application of Dialectical Materialism to the study of society, economics and history.

At personal level, Marx's started taking serious interest in materialist analysis of society after closely following deliberations of the Rhine Province Assembly during his editorship of the German newspaper *Rheinische Zeitung* between 1842 and 1843. By then, he was also inspired by the discovery of the cell, transformation of energy and Darwin's theory of evolution. He developed an elaborated theory of Materialism during his visits to Manchester between 1841 and 1844. His grounding into materialist philosophy and mastery over Hegel's philosophy and his grand intellectual visualization helped him to develop an overarching materialist theory, which revolutionized the outlook of the world. Engel's philosophical collaboration with Marx helped in systematizing the body of knowledge of Marxian Materialism, which was significant in many ways. All the later philosophers including Lenin had garnered their knowledge of Marxian Materialism much from the writings of Engels.

The Critical Development

Marx and Engels had studied the all the previous – the Greek, the English, the French and the post-Hegelian German – versions of Materialism meticulously either to accept or refute the previous arguments. This critical development initially liberated Materialism from its mechanistic tendencies, which had roots in English and French Materialism. According to mechanism, all the natural phenomena could be explained by the rules of mechanistic motion. For example, world consists of nothing but interactions of the particles of the matter. This trend gained the reputation during 18th century during the advent of mechanical sciences.

This version was refuted by Marx and Engels due to its three weaknesses viz. a) it requires the conception of Supreme Being or Force, which started the world up, b) it seeks to reduce all processes to the same cycle of mechanistic interactions, hence cannot account for the development for the emergence of new qualities and new types of processes in nature, and c) it cannot account for the social development; it can provide no account of human social activity and leads to an abstract conception of human nature.

The major development of Marxian Materialism lies in turning the Hegel's idealist dialectics into materialistic one. Engels explained this process fascinatingly in his *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*. One of the important statements of Hegel - All that is real is rational; and all that is rational is real – seems to be an approval to the status quo. Indeed it has

been understood as endorsement to despotism, police government and censorship of the then Prussian King Frederick William III. However, Engels explains that Hegel never held everything that exists being the real without further qualification. For Hegel, any thing that should be real must also possess necessary value. Prussian state was real and hence rational as long as it holds its necessity in history. In 1789, French monarchy had become unreal as it lost its necessity to exist and became so irrational; hence it had to be destroyed by the Great Revolution, of which Hegel always speaks with the greatest enthusiasm.” Hence, “In the course of development, all that was previously real becomes unreal, loses its necessity, its right of existence, its rationality. And in the place of moribund reality comes a new, viable reality – peacefully if the old has enough intelligence to go to its death without a struggle; forcibly if it resists this necessity.” Engels lucidly explains this development, “All that is real in the sphere of human history, becomes irrational in the process of time, is therefore irrational by its very destination... and everything which is rational in the minds of men is destined to become real, however much it may contradict existing apparent reality.” Thus Hegel was not simply refuted in Marxian philosophy, but a new start was made from his revolutionary side i.e. Dialectical Method.

Materialist Basis

The major contribution of Dialectical Materialism was it explained all the worldly phenomena from stand point of philosophy and provided materialist basis for every thing. Marx and Engels had not only attacked the encroachment of religion in philosophy, but also represented the development of science in philosophy and provided a materialist basis that has radicalized our perception of important aspects of human life including religion, philosophy, science and history.

The Marxian philosophical method was also materialistic. Rather than using the prevailing speculative style, which they hated, Marx and Engels had employed the arguments from the sciences, both physical and social, to make their cases. Hegel’s philosophy, political economy and Darwinian biology had supplied the data and insights for their subject matter. By avoiding speculative metaphysics, they avoided the abstract thought. By using the concrete categories of history, they produced the arguments which are axiomatic.

George Novack expounds the idea of material substance in Dialectical Materialism; “It conceives the universe in all its manifestations to consist of matter in motion. Matter should not be pictured as inert, characterless, and leaden, as it is often misrepresented by opponents of Materialism.” He further explains the material substance is dynamic with all possible forms which could be, “found to be electrically energetic, infinitely plastic, and, in organic beings, can even become sensitive, alive and intelligent.” This definition of matter is not a closed one, but open to the new forms of matter. Engels emphasised on the need to change of forms of Materialism according to the advancement in science. Going beyond the questions pertaining to physical matter, Marx and Engels had provided comprehensive theories of knowledge, society and history.

Theory of Knowledge

Marxian Materialism did not ask the long-standing epistemological questions in the way they had been asked i.e. how the knowledge possible etc. Rather it explored the materialist factors that govern the production of knowledge. Mind functioning is a thoroughly natural organic process.

“If, as Materialism holds, everything in the universe consists of matter in motion, then the human mind must likewise be a material phenomenon...If the collective intelligence of mankind was developed out of nature and society, the mind of the individual does not and cannot exist except as a function of his brain and his body. The gradual growth of intelligence, the effects of hunger, narcotics, or the disappearance of intelligence at death testify to the dependence of mind upon its material bases” explains Novack.

From this standpoint, it is not difficult to answer the long pending questions of epistemology such as “How can we know the world around us?”. From its very organic nature, human mind can contemplate about its surrounding phenomena and form different mental images such as concepts and ideas by labouring upon its possessed information. Upon the epistemological question of veracity of knowledge acquired by the human beings, Novack replies, “The test of man’s ability to know the external world truly is to be found in practice. Despite setbacks and stagnation, man’s intellectual comprehension of the world has steadily increased together with his practical mastery over nature.”

Theory of Society

In his *A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy*, Marx outlined his theory of society through the famous ‘Base and Super Structure’ metaphor. According to him, human beings enter into particular relations of productions and the totality of these relations forms the economic structure of a society. The economic structure is the base on which everything else such as art, religion, philosophy, education and politics would be based upon. It is not surprising that the super structural components most often echo with the opinions of the existing mode productions be it as feudalism or capitalism or socialism. Any change in the base would cause corresponding shift in super structure too. Marx applied this theory through out his philosophical, historical and economic analyses and demonstrated the primacy of economic factors in the changes of the society.

Theory of History

The word ‘History’ as used by Marx and Engels does not mean the past recorded by the historian. It means the social world in which men involved in making history live and by which they are determined; the action and interaction of man in society and totality of such actions. Marx refuted Hegel’s idealist scheme of history i.e. of the Sprit and proposed four fundamental premises for the human history. They are:

1. Existence of human individuals is the first premise of all human history, without whom ‘making’ of human history would be impossible.
2. The urge to satisfy the first needs such as quenching the thirst and hunger, need for clothing and shelter, from which the new needs emerge and this production of new needs is the first historical act.

3. Third premise is the men who labour to make their life begin to make other men, the human reproduction, to propagate their kind. This effort forms the relationships of man and woman, parents and children and the family.

4. The procreation has two dimensions, natural and social. After establishment of societies, human beings through their labour establish economic life by cooperating among themselves on a large scale; and the multitude of productive forces accessible to men determines the nature of society. All the economic and political institutions are built upon this premise.

Marxian philosophy of history – Historical Materialism – has been an astounding success and was adopted by historians across the world. It gave birth to T 'history from below approach', which is still an accepted method in historiography.

Criticism and Legacy

Dialectical Materialism was criticised and critiqued by thinkers such as Max Weber, Karl Renner and Karl Popper. Weber objected such rigorous economic interpretation from the view point of cultural primacy over economy. (To understand Weber's point, think how caste oppression, a cultural phenomenon, works.) Karl Renner, former president of Austria, demonstrated how the legal institutions would influence the course of economics in modern democracies. Marxian argument of economic primacy emerged during the time when legal institutions of the state had not taken their roots sufficiently. The modern states can very much keep the economic forces under check. Karl Popper, one of the most vocal critics of Marx in 20th century, criticised the latter's historicism for its claim to predict the course of history, which simply is impossible. He accused Marx for producing such pseudo-scientific theory of history.

Despite the massive criticism, Dialectical Materialism still enjoys tremendous influence. Due to its influence, millions of people across the world have converted themselves into nontheists (sic). Karl Marx has become one of the three principle architects of modern social science along with Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. Isaiah Berlin, a prominent Liberal thinker held that Marx may be regarded as the 'true father' of modern sociology, "in so far as anyone can claim the title." Popper stated Marx opened and sharpened our eyes in many ways and a return to pre- Marxian social science is inconceivable, stated Karl Popper. This Unit could be closed with an observation of success of materialist component in Marxism; though millions had lost faith in Marxian communism after fall of the USSR, a good number of them remain cling to their nontheist world outlook.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What was the 'revolutionary element' in Hegelian philosophy?

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2) How the philosophical progress happened from Feuerbach to Marx and Engels?
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3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we tried to provide the philosophical history of Materialism from ancient Greek period to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. We have seen how Materialism had developed in ancient and modern periods and its social and historical dimensions were also duly explained. In Marxian Materialism, development of the fundamental ideas was explained in detailed. We have also seen how the philosophical revolution of Marx and Engels had changed the outlook of millions of people across the world, which caused paradigm shift in our perception of science, religion, history, political economy and philosophy.

3.6 KEY WORDS

Materialism: See the given definition in section 3.1.

Idealism: See the given definition in section 3.1.

Metaphysics: A branch of philosophy which enquires into the fundamental reality of the world, which Aristotle described as 'Study of the Prime Mover' and the 'Study of Being as Being'. His definition indicates the two trends of this branch. Metaphysics asks similar questions to those of physical sciences such as - what is fundamental block of this world. The answer may be 'the atom' or 'divine substance', based on the world view of those who reply.

Didactical Method: See the given definition in section 3.3

Mechanistic Materialism: See the given definition in section 3.3.

Didactical Materialism: See the given definition in section 3.3.

Historical Materialism: See the given definition in section 3.3.

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UNIT 4 PROBLEM OF EVIL

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Types of Evils
- 4.3 Logical Argument from Evil
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- 4.5 Theories of Evil: Western perspective
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

The problem of evil challenged the existence of God. As Stumpf observed, the problem of evil traditionally has been understood as an apparent inconsistency in theistic beliefs. The gruesome facts of suffering provide unmistakable, objective evidence that an all-powerful and perfectly loving God does not exist. For more than two millennia, dramatists, theologians, philosophers and their modern counterparts have pondered the problem of evil. The unit attempts to capture the problem of evil as dealt in philosophy in both Western and Indian traditions.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Philosopher's task is to see whether the facts of suffering, which induce a range of powerful religious reactions involving belief, emotion, and motivation, also provide the basis for a cogent argument from evil to the non-existence of God—an argument that should persuade the reasonable person who considers it carefully. Philosophy, like literature preoccupied with the problem of evil: its origin, nature, and effects. Philosophers have tried to define evil, to assess the utility of the moralistic language of evil, and to ask what the existence of evil says about human nature. Religious thinkers have asked how an all-powerful and benevolent God can tolerate evil and undeserved suffering; whether evil is intelligible and serves some rational purpose or is utterly inexplicable; and whether evil is intractable or can be eradicated or overcome. In the twentieth century secular explanations of evil, attributing evil to environmental or psychological defects, tended to replace religious and philosophic ones, at least among intellectuals. Psychologists and sociologists blamed evil on such factors as mental disease, past abuse, psychological desensitization, and dysfunctional patterns of development; social demographic, economic, and political stresses; frustrations, inequalities, dislocations, flawed ideologies and misplaced idealism. Contingency is a hallmark of many historical accounts of evil. A key goal of moral history of evil must be to understand the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions and ideologies that misshape societies and allow collective evil to develop, take root and flourish. Historical evils are resulted from forces as diverse as racial and religious intolerance, difficult economic circumstances, the untrammelled workings of the free market, and utopian and messianic ideas.

4.2 TYPES OF EVILS

Philosophers and theologians are discussed the problem of evil for centuries. They tried to classify evil into two broad categories, namely, moral and natural.

Moral evil - This covers the willful acts of human beings (such wars, crimes, self destructive vices and damages they cause in human life as murder, rape, etc.)

Natural evil - This refers to natural disasters (such as famines, floods, and destructive effects of earth quakes and so on.)

There are two classes of evil:

1. Physical evil - This means bodily pain or mental anguish (fear, illness, grief, war, etc.)
2. Metaphysical evil - This refers to such things as imperfection and chance (criminals going unpunished, deformities, etc.)

There is another way to distinguish evil as moral and non-moral. Evil is what harms human beings. The moral evil is harm done by human beings to other human beings. The non-moral evil is viewed as a harm done to human beings by non human agents and events.

4.3 LOGICAL ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

The classical form of argument from evil demonstrates the impossibility of God's creating a world containing any evil whatsoever. This basic idea was put forward by Epicurus, Greek philosopher was forcefully restated by David Hume, eighteenth century Scottish philosopher and fierce critic of Christianity in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*: 'Is He willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Whence then is evil?'

This may put it in this logical sequence:

1. If God exists and is perfectly good, then He will prevent as much evil as He can.
2. If God exists and is omnipotent (and omniscient), then He can prevent any evil from occurring.
3. There is evil

Conclusion: God does not exist, or He is not omnipotent and omniscient, or He is not perfectly good.

4.4 TYPOLOGY OF EVIL

In her book, *The Many Faces of Evil*, Amelie Oksenberg Rorty provides a complex and six fold typology of metaphysical –theological treatment of evil. First, there is only divine goodness while evil as an illusion. (what is often called theodicy), secondly that there is some evil, but the latter is only a lesser degree or a 'privation' of goodness (a view prominently associated with St. Augustine); thirdly, that good and evil are both real and permanently conflicting forces (what is called Manichaeism); fourthly, that human reason postulates a perfectly rational universe but acknowledges evil as a dilemma (a view ascribed to Kant); fifthly that evil is real and the world is a mess (Schopenhauer); and sixthly, that good and evil are nothing in themselves but only

social constructs (Hobbes and possibly Nietzsche). By contrast Susan Neiman in her book *Evil in Modern Thought* makes to do only two major types, namely arguments relying on 'free from heaven' and arguments bent on 'condemning the architect'. Whereas the former advanced by philosophers celebrating divine or rational 'order' despite real-life experience to the contrary, the second are favored by an assortment of realists, pessimists and cynics. Fred Dallmayr approached the problem in different way. He finds three categories that are traditionally dominated discussion of evil. They are: radical monism, radical dualism and third category involving a spectrum ranging from modified monism to modified dualism. Radical monism holds that ultimate reality-being a reflection of divine or a benevolent creator- is wholly good and perfect where as perceived imperfections are illusions or the result of ignorance. This theory is mostly associated with Leibniz, but it can also be found in versions of Christian and neo-platonic 'gnosis'. The prototype of radical dualism is Manichaeism, but it can also be found in 'gnosticism' and extreme puritan theories of pre-destination. The middle ground between monism and dualism is occupied by neo-platonic and Christian thinkers ready to acknowledge evil but giving primacy to divine goodness. Thus in treating evil as mere 'privation' of goodness, Augustine approximates the monist view; however by insisting on 'fallenness' of human nature and the distinction between the heavenly and earthly cities, his theory slides towards Manichaean dualism.

4.5 THEORIES OF EVIL: WESTERN PERSPECTIVE

McCloskey had an attempt to map the prominent theories and explanation of problem of evil. The theists offered different explanations for the problem of evil. Some of the people consider evil as real and some viewed as an unreal or as privation. Some consider it from moral view point and some discussed it as a matter of faith. These are some of the prominent explanation to problem of evil:

1. *Evil as unreal.* This view is usually explained by reference to an analogy with the arts. Discord in one part of a symphony produces greater harmony and beauty in the whole. Few theists would seriously wish to contend that moral evil is unreal-that it is illusion rather than reality. However, some theists have argued that pain is not really evil. Our thinking that it is evil is said to result from viewing it out of its context. If we had "a God's eye view" we should see that such alleged evil is a valuable part of the whole which heightens the beauty of the majestic, divine melody. In brief, the attempt to solve the problem of evil by asserting that evil is unreal rests on an argument which, if valid, would simply suggest that evil might be justified. It is an argument that most theists will feel impelled to reject because of its shocking moral implications. And it is invalid because it rests on a false analogy between aesthetic appraisal and moral judgment.

2. *Evil as privation.* The view that evil is a privation of proper good, or of right order. It is an attempt to steer a middle course between saying that it is merely illusion and saying that it is fully real. It is hoped thereby to circumvent the difficulty of having to attribute to God the creation of evil as a positive nature. Evil, it is claimed, is such that its nature lies in the absence or privation of good rather than in the presence of something positive or intrinsic.

Evil is real. It has a real nature of its own. It is not simply privation of being or of right order. And even if it were, the problem of explaining it would remain, for sin and pain do not become justified and do not cease to be a problem merely by being described as a privation rather than as an intrinsic nature.

3. *Evil as real but justified.* With moral evil, the free will explanation dominates the field. Moral evil is explained as a consequence of God's gift to man of free will. Where the physical evil

involved, there are explanations of evil as real but justified. Evil as means to good. Evil as unavoidable, or as undeserved and unavoidable but compensated for in an after life. C.A. Campbell suggests that while some do suffer undeservedly in this life, God could not avoid such suffering. But God makes amends for such suffering by granting compensate joy in the next life. It is pointed out that physical evil is not to be explained as deserved punishment; nor as unavoidable suffering, which is or is not compensated for in an after life; nor it is justified as a means to greater goods.

4. *Moral Evil*. Moral evil is usually accepted as something real and then explained in terms of free will. The theist argues that God created man with the gift of freedom but man chose to sin. God could not prevent the latter possibility without denying free will. Hence, God is not the author of sin. The value of free will (and/or the goodness of the moral goods it makes possible) justifies the evils that come into being as a result of the misuse by man of his free will.

5. *Faith and Evil*

Does faith provides way out of the problems of moral evil and suffering? It is often argued that it is presumptuous and arrogant for us to try to judge God on the basis of our limited human reason. If faith is understood as something some thing that improves our moral life, it simply makes the problem of moral evil more acute. It is argued that faith can no more used to explain or justify the moral evil, than it can be used as a basis for overcoming the problem of suffering. Faith is not an aid to the theist in his attempt to solve the problem of evil. The problem of evil is in fact aggravated by the claim that faith improves moral performance.

St. Augustine's Theodicy

Defenses of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of this problem - called *Theodicies* - also stretch back to the beginnings of Christianity. The thing to note about theodicy is that none of the main aspects of the problem change: God is still all-good, omniscient and omnipotent; evil still seems to exist. The difference is, however, that some reason is given to explain how all of these things can be true at the same time. St Augustine (354-430) put the problem most concisely: "Either God cannot abolish evil, or he will not; if he cannot then he is not all-powerful; if he will not then he is not all good." St. Augustine theodicy is a prominent theory of evil considered by many theologians and philosophers. St. Augustine and Reinhold Niebuhr stressed evil's inward character, its roots in human pride, arrogance, sensuality, selfishness, and alienation from the divine. Drawing upon the notion of original sin, this perspective sees the capacity for sinfulness as omnipresent, lying ultimately in the human capacity for self-deception and the tendency to confuse self-interest with righteousness. Other theologians have adopted a Manichean perspective, regarding evil as an entity outside the self.

The Free-Will Argument

A modern advocate of Augustine's view can be found in Alvin Plantinga (*God, Freedom and Evil*, 1974) who claimed that for God to have created a being who could only have performed good actions would have been logically impossible. Plantinga's view of the free will defense is a landmark in contemporary discussions of the problem of evil. As he expounds it, the free will defense rests on the two philosophical claims, which it adds to the theological assumptions that God is omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good. And Human beings have free will, and possession of free will and use of it to do more good than evil is a. Perhaps the most common

theodicy is the so-called free-will argument - very similar to Augustine's argument - which goes something like this:

1. Evil is the result of human error
2. Human error results from free-will (the ability to do wrong)
3. If we didn't have free-will we would be robots
4. God prefers a world of free agents to a world of robots
5. Evil is therefore an unfortunate - although not unavoidable outcome - of free-will
6. For God to intervene would be to go take away our free-will
7. Therefore, God is neither responsible for evil nor guilty of neglect for not intervening

This view was later criticised by Anthony Flew and J.L. Mackie, who both argue that God *could* have chosen to create "good robots" who still possessed free-will.

John Hick's Theodicy

The philosopher John Hick (b.1922) has developed the view 'Irenaean theodicy' further. St Irenaeus (130-202 AD), a Father of the early Christian Church, who thought that humanity was not created perfect, but that they required growth in order to approach spiritual perfection. However, God does not necessarily intend evil to provide a means for this growth. According this, for a person could grow to spiritual perfection simply by obeying God's laws. Also, from Irenaeus's point of view, God does not intervene in human affairs to prevent evil because that would be to interfere with free will. Hick agrees with Irenaeus that God created us with the potential for spiritual growth. However, Hick then sees the process of 'soul making' (as he calls it) to be a response to the evil in the world. So, if cancer did not exist, or the evil actions of others, then we would not have the means whereby we could develop spiritually. Also, Hick argues, there exists what he terms an 'epistemic distance' between human beings and God, so that we are not born knowing of his existence, and it is not something which it is easy to gain certain knowledge of. Therefore, the process of soul making also involves a battle to attain religious faith.

Two further consequences of Hick's theodicy should be borne in mind here: firstly, because some individuals do not seem to have opportunity to develop spiritually (e.g. in the case of infant death), Hick argues that we must bring the possibility of an afterlife into the equation (so that such souls receive a heavenly reward); secondly, because there is such a great amount of evil in the world, and not all suffering seems fair or understandable, we must finally admit that we cannot fully understand God's reasons or His plan.

The Process Theodicy

Process philosophy is the idea that reality is in a state of change and development. From this point of view, no opinion of how the world is can always be true. Process theology argues that the reality of God is not fixed and that God himself is still developing. From this point of view, God is "dipolar" - that is, has two "poles", one mental and one physical. The physical pole is the material world itself, which acts almost as God's "body".

Because of this relationship, God is partly distinct and partly immersed in the world - just as we are in our bodies. As a result, any suffering in creation is also undergone by God, and creation itself is seen as a cooperation between God and all other beings. Whether this cooperation actually takes place is thus up to humanity - in other words, God cannot force humans to do His will, but can only influence them.

4.6 PROBLEM OF EVIL: INDIAN UNDERSTANDING

The western theories of evil are mostly explained from Christianity. Indian perspectives on problem of evil are different from the west. The dominant conception of India is derived from Hinduism. The scholars try to explain it differently from the Semitic religious traditions. Does evil belong to the divine or is it purely human or psychological phenomenon? It is argued that evil is a major theological problem in the Semitic religious traditions as the existence of God and evil are not compatible and reconcilable. It is also argued that understanding of the problem of evil is depends upon ones world view. The theistic world view of evil would be significantly different from that of that world view is non-theistic. As Ramamurty argues in his book *Indian Philosophy of Religion: In Hinduism the explanation of evil is more metaphysical than theological as there is no doctrine of creation in Hinduism. Since God is not the creator of the world He is in no way connected with the explanation of evil. The problem of evil is delinked with the existence of God. Evil is viewed and explained basically in terms of man and his spiritual growth.* It is more or less a value or a meaning which man attaches to certain things and experiences. The objective world or the world of facts in itself is neither good nor bad. It acquires the value of good or bad from the point of view of man who judges things in terms of their value and significance to himself. What is good or what is evil depends ultimately upon the culture and religion to which man belongs. Further it is viewed that Indian philosophers of religion are basically pragmatic in their attitude and approach to religion, and its problems. Their analysis and understanding of the problem of evil is also basically pragmatic as their object in understanding the problem of evil is to help man in overcoming it. A purely theoretical understanding of the problem of evil may not be possible as it is not amenable to rational understanding of man. And at a same time the problem is highly significant to man and his religious life of attaining perfection.

A major explanation of evil which characterizes Indian understanding of the problem of evil, and is common to several thinkers and schools of thought is that though man is supreme or best form of manifestation of the divine, he is somehow unaware of his divine origin and nature. Instead, he thinks of himself as having an independent existence, and therefore lives for himself, and conducts himself as if he is his own master and explanation.

It is often claimed that the doctrine of karma and rebirth provides Indian religion with a satisfying account of evil and suffering than do typical Western solutions to the problem of evil. Arthur Herman, in his work *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought*, similarly asserts the superiority of karma to all Western theodicies : "Unlike the Western theories, the doctrine of rebirth is capable of meeting the major objections against which those Western attempts all

failed" (Herman 1976, p. 287). The doctrine of karma and rebirth represents perhaps the most striking difference between Western (Judeo-Christian) religious thought and the Indian religious traditions (especially Hindu). To be sure, Western theology also makes use of a retributive explanation of evil in which an individual's suffering is accounted for by his previous wrongdoing. But given the obviously imperfect correlation between sin and suffering in an individual's lifetime, Western religions have resorted to other explanations of suffering (including, notoriously, that of Original Sin). However, Indian thought boldly combines this retributionism with the idea of multiple human incarnations, so that all suffering in this life can be explained by each individual's prior wrongdoing, whether in this or in a prior life, and all wrong-doing in the present life will be punished in either this or a future life. In this way, Indian thought is able to endorse a complete and consistent retributive explanation of evil: all suffering can be explained by the wrongdoing of the sufferer himself. However, the theory of karma and rebirth is seriously attacked by many scholars that it justifies the inequalities in a society and keeps the system status quo by not allowing the questioning the dominant hegemony. Critics argue that theory of karma and rebirth has its own limitations in providing satisfactory explanation for the problem of evil. What kind of explanation is offered for the unfairness, injustice, and innocent suffering in the world? It is argued that the doctrine, in whatever form it is proposed, suffers from serious limitations that render it unlikely to provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of evil.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

Evil as understood as antithesis of good. It becomes a moral question. Kant conceives of evil in human nature as the will or disposition or propensity to act on maxims contrary to the moral law. If good is value realization, and evil is value destruction. Evil is serious unjustified harm inflicted on sentient beings. Theologians confuse the fact with origin of the evil; theodicies tend to confuse the fact with the locus of the evil. The one reduces evil to the status of a sin or a derivative from it; the other reduces evil to the status of imperfection according to one, there would be no evils were there no wickedness; according to the other, there would be no evils were there nothing finite. The first is right in maintaining that evil can be the outcome of the good activity of good beings, just as the second is right in remarking that the occurrence of evil is not depend on spiritual failures.

Many theologians and philosophers over the centuries have asked this question and look at some answers. The question often asked how a good God could create a world with evil in it, why such a deity does not do something to help combat such evil. We have various explanations from religious people and philosophers. The problem itself arises because of certain qualities which religious believers grant to God, and the consequences of these given certain observations about the world. Understanding evil is crucial to our conception of morality. The philosophical approach to the problem of evil is different from the theological approaches. It has potential to understand the problem in fair and objective manner. It will broaden our understanding.

4.7 KEY WORDS

Theories of evil, theistic, moral evil, theodicy, sin, morality, karma, theologians, free will, God

4.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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