UNIT-14 THE CONCEPT OF PERSON

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 The Concept of Person (Locke)

14.4Hume's View

14.5 Persons and their experiences

14.6 Rene Descartes and the "no ownership doctrine"

14.7 The Concept of person as primitive

14.8 Appreciation and criticism of Strawson's theory

14.9 Let us Sum Up

14.10 Further Readings

14. 11 Answer to Check Your Progress

14.12 Model Questions

14.1 LEARNING OJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Explain the Concept of person
- Discuss briefly about some philosophers like Descartes, Locke, Kant, Hume and Strawson
- Explain the concept of person according to Locke
- Discuss Hume's view on person
- Explain Descartes' view on person
- Discuss the concept of person as primitive
- Explain P.F. Strawson's View on Person
- Discuss Mind and Body relation which is related to a person
- Explain about person and their experience
- Discuss Vagaries of Personal Identity

14.2 INTRODUCTION

Person is an individual capable of moral agency. Although the details of their theories of human nature differ widely, Descartes, Locke, Kant and

Strawson, all accepted a functional description of the person that includes both mental and physical features: the attribution of responsibilities to a moral agent requires both the ability to choose and an ability to act on that choice.

One of the central problems of metaphysics is what it is to be a person. The answer ought to account for central phenomena of personhood; traditionally, command of language, self-consciousness, control or agency, and moral worth or title to request are amongst the salient characteristics that have been thought to distinguish persons from other forms of life. In Lock, "person" is a "forensic term, applying for moral reasons." A dualistic approach regards a person as an amalgam of an essentially separate mind and body, with the resulting problem of reinventing their unity in the living person, monistic theories, such as that of Strawson's Individuals (1959), work with a primitive concept of a person, as someone think logically capable of being described in bodily or mental terms. A popular modern analogy is with the compatible software and hardware descriptions of a computer.



LET US KNOW

Descartes, Rene (1596-1650): French philosophers. Descartes's efforts to achieve certainty in the face of scepticism mark the origins of modern epistemology.

Locke (1632-1704): English Philosopher. Lock was born in Wrington and educated at Oxford, where he seemed destined for a career in medicine.

Kant, Immanual(1724-1804): German philosopher who revolutionised modern philosophy, in an effort to counter the sceptical arguments of Hume and provide a firm basis for human knowledge and morality. Kant used transcendental arguments to show that human

beings apply synthetic a priori judgements as the preconditions for any possible experience.

Strawson, Peter F. (1919-): British philosopher who applies the methods of analytic philosophy to traditional philosophical problems.Strawson criticised Russell's theory of descriptions in "On Referring" (1950) and developed the notion of descriptive (as opposed to revisionary) metaphysics in reference to problem of reidentification of particulars in Individual: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics (1959). His The Bounds of Sense (1966) is an extended commentary on the critical philosophy of Kant.

14.3 THE CONCEPT OF PERSON (LOCKE)

The concept of person is closely related with the concept of personal identity. Person is a term that has various technical and semi technical use in philosophy. It is derived from the Latin word 'persona'. Boethius, a Roman philosopher meant by person "an individual substance of a rational kind. "The concept of rationality has occurred in subsequent accounts of person. In the modern period the definition of person has been given clearly by Locke, the eminent British empiricist philosopher. Locke began his discussion by raising the question-what personal identity is? Such identity, Lock tells us, is purely a matter of consciousness. It rests upon the continuity introduce into consciousness by memory. Locke wrote, "in this alone consists personal identity, that is, the sameness of a rational being; and as far as these can be extended backwards to any past action of thought so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now as it was them" Therefore, we might add even supposing that there were reincarnation, the reborn soul, though the same thinking substance, would not be even the same person any longer, since in this reincarnation he has forgotten his former lives. Thus Locke defined 'person' in terms of memory continuity.

A number of subsidiary points have now to be considered. Can this continuity of consciousness and memory be preserved, when the substance

underlying it is changed? Locke replies that since the body can be mutilated and altered and even completely renewed without interfering with personal identity, continuity of consciousness is not dependent upon permanence of organic constitution. So, too, there is no reason why it should not be independent of changes in thinking substance, or the soul. There is no certainty that one and the same consciousness and the personal identity might not be "transferred from one thinking substance to another", in which case "it will possible that two thinking substance may make but one person. For the same consciousness being preserved, whether in the same or different substances, the personal identity is preserved,"

Supposed, however, "I wholly lose the memory of some parts of my life beyond a possibility of retrieving them yet am I not the same person that did those actions, had those thought that I was conscious of, though I have now forgotten them? 'No' Locke replies. I am the same man but not the same person. Thus Locke introduces a significant distinction between person and man. One and the same man might be a number of different persons. "If he had distinct incommunicable consciousness at different times."

So, Locke argued that to remain the same man (or woman) is to keep the same body (but of course with renewed material), to remained the same person is to keep the same mind, with its ability to remember its past, while to remained the same immaterial substratum is for something pretty much incomprehensible and unverifiable to happens . According to Locke, it is person, not man, who is morally responsible. Locke's understanding of the nature of a person has been criticized by many philosophers.



LET US KNOW

Boethius, Anicius Manlius Severinus (480-524): His commentary on the Isagoge of Porphyry (itself a discussion of Aristotle's Categories)

carefully distinguished Aristotelian essences from Platonic Forms, setting the basic terms employed in subsequent mediaeval discussion of the problem of universals. De consolation philosophae (The consolation of Philosophy), written during the imprisonment that preceded his execution, considers the possibility of achieving human happiness despite the inescapable presence of evil, extols the benefits of reason even in the face of misfortunate and bad advice and proposes a compatibilist account of human freedom in the face of divine foreknowledge.



Activity 14.1

Write down the concept of person according to Lock

.....

.....



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: fill in the blanks:

The concept of person is closely related with the concept of personal_____.

Person is derived from the Latin word '_____'.

_____, a Roman philosopher meant by person "an individual substance of a rational kind. ".

The concept of rationality has occurred in subsequent accounts of _____.

Such identity, Lock tells us, is purely a matter of consciousness. It rests upon the continuity introduce into consciousness by _____.

Q 2: What Locke said about the distinction between 'man' and 'person'?

.....

.....

14.4 HUME'S VIEW

In the philosophy of Hume the term 'person' is employed in the sense of mind. It is a restricted framework. Here a person is nothing but a bundle of impressions and ideas. Hume rejected the possibility of the existence of one continuing substance underlying the multiplicity of perceptions. The question at this stage may be raised-what criterion should applied to decide that a particular being is a person? Two criteria are generally applied by philosophers;one is the criteria of bodily identity. According to it we reidentify a person on the basis of bodily continuity. This criterion, as we have seen, was employed by Locke.

It has been commented that there are several ways in which the bodily criterion is more fundamental than the memory criterion. A few points are to be noted here-

Although both criteria are sufficient only bodily identity is necessary. The bodily criterion is more extensive. It is matter of chance that men remember the tracks of their lives that they do remember rather than those they do not and we can apply the memory criterion only when there are memories to use. But in a clear sense the bodily criterion can always be used, for the body is always present whenever the person is.

P.F. Strawson has given a very influential definition of person in the contemporary period. He says that the concept of a person is a logically primitive concept. Person is that to whom both mental and physical attributes can be ascribed. Person is, in other words. The entity underlying both the physical and mental attributes.



LET US KNOW

Hume (1711-76): Scottish philosopher, historian and essayist. Hume is the most influential Thoroughgoing naturalist in modern philosophy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What criterion should apply to decide that a particular being is a person?

.....

.....

14.5 PERSONS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES

We have seen how the positing of physical objects leads to our drawing a distinction between the objects as they are in themselves and the experiences through which we come to know them. The objects are thought to retain their perceptible properties whether or not anyone actually perceives them. When percepts do occur they are treated as sensations which belong to the observer in the same way as the thoughts and images and feelings that do not supply material for the construction of the physical world. The question which we must now try to answer is how these various elements are brought together and how they are related to the body by which the observer is identified.

In saying that the observer is identified by his body, we have to employ physical criteria for the identification of other people will hardly be disputed, but it may well be denied that this applies also to our identification of ourselves. Descartes is not the only philosopher, much less the only person, to have believed that in being self-conscious one is aware of a

spiritual substance which is housed contingently and perhaps only temporarily in the body.(Rene Descartes, Discourse on Method, Part-V). This view may not be tenable, but it surely deserves to be examined

Self-consciousness is not a primitive datum, or in other words that the observer's experiences are not intrinsically marked as his own. They are distinguished as his experiences only by contrast with the external world and with the experiences of others who also inhabit it. But then to arrive at these contrasts he must, as we have seen, distinguish the central body from other physical objects, and in particular from those other objects which are also the sources of signs. It is, as I said, his ability to interpret these signs as corroborating his main account of the world but not as corroborating his subsidiary accounts, and also as giving subsidiary accounts which he cannot corroborate, that leads him to think of the central body as sharing with other bodies the property of being the focus of an independent series of experiences. His own experiences are thus initially characterized as those of which the central body is the focus. Once this point has been reached, it may be possible to proceed to a more sophisticated theory in which the attachment of experiences to a body, or to a particular body, is not conceived to be necessary, or even to a theory in which they are assigned a different sort of owner. Whether any such theories are tenable remains to be seen. It is also of importance that the observer's identification of himself goes together with his identification of other persons and with their identification of him. He takes the signs which emanate from these other bodies as a ground for attributing experiences to the persons with whom he now associates them, and he realizes that these persons take the signs which emanate from the central body as a ground for attributing experiences to him. Seeing himself, as it were, through their eyes, he regards the central body as belonging to him in the special way in which their bodies belong to them, and he thinks of his body not only as a contributory cause of his percepts but also as the medium through which his entertainment of them, and indeed of his experiences in general, is made known to others.



LET US KNOW

Descartes, Rene (1595-1650): French philosopher. Descartes' efforts to achieve certainty in the face of scepticism mark the origin of modern epistemology

Consciousness: The subjective phenomenon of self-awareness that normally accompanies human experience. Correct analysis of consciousness is a central goal in the philosophy of mind.



Activity 14.2

Give some examples of Consciousness and non-consciousness

.....

.....



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What is Consciousness?

.....

.....

Q 5: Who is the author of Discourse on Method?

.....

.....

14.6 Rene Descartes and "No-ownership doctrine"

According to Cartesianism, when we speak of a person we are really referring to one or both of two distinct substances of different types, each of which has its own appropriate types of states and properties

States of consciousness belong to one of these substances and not to other. Strawson rejects this theory because for him "the concept of the pure individual consciousness 'the pure ego', is a concept that can't exist; or at last, can't exist as a primary concept in terms of which the concept of a person can be explained or analysed. It can exist only, if at all, as a secondary, non-primitive concept, which itself is to be explained, analysed in terms of a person." (Strawson, 1959, p.102)

In our day-to-day speech we use expressions like "I am in pain", "I had a severe pain", "my pain…" etc. These expressions somehow suggest that I am the owner of this particular experience of having pain. According to the no-ownership theorist, experience can be said to have an owner only in the sense of their casual dependence upon the state of some particular body. This casual dependence is sufficient to ascribe one's experiences to some particular, individual thing. We can own something only if its ownership is logically transferable. Thus, experience is not owned by anything except in the dubious sense of being causally dependent on the state of a particular body.

This theory according to Strawson is incoherent. The theorist denies the existence of the sense of possession but he is forced to make use of it when he tries to deny its existence. Strawson argues that any attempt to eliminate the "my", "my experience", "my headache" etc. would yield something that is not a contingent fact at all. It is simply wrong to state that all experiences are causally dependent on the state of of a single body. But the theorist cannot consistently argue that 'all experiences of person p means the same thing as all experience of a certain body B' for then the proposition would not be contingent, as his theory requires, but analytic. With "my

experience" he means a certain class of experiences of a person. It is the sense of this 'my' and 'of' that he requires to deny that, because being 'my experience' is -for the experience in question-no contingent matter but necessary. That my headache is my headache is-for the headache -no contingent matter.



Activity 14.3

How you define your pain to other person

.....

.....



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What is no-ownership Theory?

.....

.....

Q 7: Why no-ownership theory is incoherent according to Strawson?

.....

.....

14.7 THE CONCEPT OF PERSON AS PRIMITIVE

To get of these difficulties Strawson's suggests acknowledging the concept of person as primitive i.e. as a concept that cannot be analysed further in a certain way to another. That means: "the concept of a person is the concept of a type of entity, such that both predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics, a physical situation are equally applicable to a single individual of that single type" (Strawson). In other words, the states of consciousness cannot be ascribed at all, unless they are ascribed at all, unless they are ascribed to persons

(in Strawson's sense) It is to this concept of person, not to the pure ego, that the personal pronoun "I' refers. Thus the concept of a person is logically prior to that of an individual consciousness.

Strawson names the predicates ascribing corporeal physical characteristics, M-predicates and those ascribing states of consciousness, P- predicates. All P predicates may not be said to be ascribing states of consciousness but they all imply the possession of consciousness on the part of that to which they are ascribed. To learn their use is to learn both the aspects of their use. We speak of 'behaving in a depressed way' and of "feeling depressed". Feelings can only be left not observed, and behaviour can only be observed not felt. But to have the concept like "X's depression", the concept must cover both what is felt by X and what is observed by others. "It is not that these predicates have two kinds of meaning. Rather, it is essential to the single kind of meaning that they do have, that both ways of ascribing them should be perfectly in order."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What are Strawson's suggestions about acknowledging the concept of person as primitive?

.....

.....

14.8 APPRECIATION AND CRITICISM OF P.F. STRAWSON'S THEORY

P.F. Strawson has given a very influential definition of person in the contemporary period. He says that the concept of a person is a logically primitive concept. Person is that to whom both mental and physical attributes can be ascribed. Person is, in other words. The entity underlying both the physical and mental attributes.

Strawson makes an attempt to show that the concept of person is primitive or simple in the sense that it cannot be further analysed. The whole argument is based on a group of central P-predicates which are other-ascribable and self ascribable. Persons cannot be defined as a union of mind and body because the possession of mental properties as well as physical properties presupposes that the owner is a person. His subtle point is that the criteria of application of any particular psychological state or property are indistinguishable from the criteria of application of physical properties unless the subject has already been identified as a person.

Strawson's theory of persons does not meet at least some important aspects of the mind-body problem, although he explicitly pretends to deal with it. His attempt has resultant not in solving the problem, but in escaping it or explaining it away. What he does is only to suggest that there is no problem with the concept of person, so to say, 'if you consider it like this', that is to say, if you consider the concept in a non-Cartesian and non-Physically way, the problem vanishes. In other words, his suggestion to consider the concept of person as primitive does not solve the traditional problem of the relation between mind and body, ontologically considered. So he offers only a conceptual solution to a real problem. And it is the real problem with which philosophers of mind deal with, especially under the influence of modern neurosciences. For instance Strawson's' conceptual analysis cannot cover problems in the context of questions concerning mental causation. How should we explain the causal relevance of mental states in the physical world in a Strawsonian way?

Another aspect of criticism may be that Strawson's criteria can be applied to other living beings like animals (perhaps to plants and trees) too, without any modification. At least a big class of P-predicates can be applied to any short of animals. No doubt, animals also have experiences; they too feel pain and so on. Even the behaviour of plants can be interpreted in vocabulary using P- predicates. If this the case, how does Strawson distinguish between animals and plants on the one hand and human persons on the other, if at all he distinguishes? Or does he intend to raise animals

and plants to the level of human beings and to credit them too with personhood? How to argue for this rather radical thesis? These and same similar questions are left open from Strawson's treatment of the concept of person.

In this context it is also worth mentioning that it is difficult to distinguish between Strawson's concept of a person and the concept of a human being, understood as the concept of a member of a biological species. Obviously the concept of a human being can also be analysed in terms of M- and P-predicates. Is Strawson of the opinion that there should not be such a distinction at all? Then he is confronted with all the problems concerning the "traditional concept" of persons, which takes "person" as synonymous with "member of the species of human beings".



LET US KNOW

Strawson. Peter F. (1919) British philosopher who applies the methods of analytic philosophy to traditional philosophical problems. Strawson criticised Russell's theory of descriptions in 'On Referring' (1950) and developed the notion of descriptive(as opposed to revisionary) metaphysics in reference to problem of reidentification of particulars in Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics (1959). His bounds of Sense (1966) are an extended commentary on the critical philosophy of Kant.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q9: Say true or false:

a) P.F. Strawson has given a very influential definition of person in the contemporary period.(T/F)

b) He says that the concept of a person is a logically not a primitive concept. (T?F)

c) Person is that to whom both mental and physical attributes can be ascribed. Person is, in other words. The entity underlying both the physical and mental attributes.(T/F)

d) Strawson makes an attempt to show that the concept of person is primitive or simple in the sense that it can be further analysed.

e) Persons cannot be defined as a union of mind and body because the possession of mental properties as well as physical properties presupposes that the owner is a person. (T/F)



14.9 LET US SUM UP

To sum up we can mention, that Strawson's theory may be seen as a conclusive theory of the concept "person". Nevertheless it cannot solve the main problems of a philosophy of personality or personhood as they are discussed nowadays in philosophy. It is an open question whether we can reformulate Strawson's theory or we must refute it altogether. At any rate we can come to be applied to a modern theory of personality without more detailed considerations.



14.10 FURTHER READING

1. Blackburn, Simon (2008): Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, 2nd Edition Revised, Oxford University Press, New York.
2. Brown, Sable (2006): illustrated Dictionary of philosophy, Lotus Press, New Delhi-110002.
3. Earle, William, James, Introduction to Philosophy, McGrow-Hill's College core books, Schaum's Series.
4. Russeoll, Bertrand, (1997): The Problems of Philosophy, Oxford University Press, Chennai.
5. Pandit, Dr S Balakrishna (1996), Western Philosophy(Me the taphysics), S B D Publishers' Distributors, Delhi-110006.

6. StrawSengupta, Dr Ira(2012): A Short History of Western Philosophy, New Central Book Agency(P) Ltd, London.
7. Thilly, Frank, revised by Wood, Ledger (1996), A History of Philosophy, Central Publishing House, Allahabad.
8. Deka, Hareswar(2010) Epistemology and Metaphysics, Assam Book Depot, Panbazar, guwahati-1.
9. Barua, Dr Girish(1991): Philosophy: Western and Indian, BhagawatiPrakashan, Golaghat.
10. Ayer, A J(1973): The Central Questions of Philosophy, The Macmillan Company of India Ltd, Delhi
11. Sinha, J,N (1991), Introduction to Philosophy, New Central Book Agency, Calcutta-9.
12. Chappell, V.C. and others (Ed.), The Philosophy of Mind, Prentice Hall, 9th edition,1962.
13. Strawson, P.F. Individuals, London; Methuen & Co Ltd., 1959.

14.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR

Ans to Q 1: (a) identity (b) persona (c) Boethius (d)person (e) memory

Answer to Q No.2: Locke introduces a significant distinction between person and man. One and the same man might be a number of different persons. "If he had distinct incommunicable consciousness at different times."

Answer to Q No. 3: Two criteria are generally applied by philosophers; one is the criteria of bodily identity. According to it we reidentify a person on the basis of bodily continuity. This criterion, as we have seen, was employed by Locke.

Answer to Q No. 4: Consciousness is the subjective phenomenon of self-awareness that normally accompanies human experience. Correct analysis of consciousness is a central goal in the philosophy of mind.

Answer to Q No 5: Rene Descartes

Answer to Q No 6: In our day-to-day speech we use expressions like "I am in pain", " I had a severe pain", " my pain…" etc. These expressions somehow suggest that I am the owner of this particular experience of

having pain. According to the no-ownership theorist, experience can be said to have an owner only in the sense of their casual dependence upon the state of some particular body. This casual dependence is sufficient to ascribe one's experiences to some particular, individual thing. We can own something only if its ownership is logically transferable. Thus, experiences are not owned by anything except in the dubious sense of being causally dependent on the state of a particular body.

Answer to Q No 7: This theory according to Strawson is incoherent. The theorist denies the existence of the sense of possession but he is forced to make use of it when he tries to deny its existence. Strawson argues that any attempt to eliminate the "my", "my experience", "my headache" etc. would yield something that is not a contingent fact at all. It is simply wrong to state that all experiences are causally dependent on the state of a single body. But the theorist cannot consistently argue that 'all experiences of person p means the same thing as all experience of a certain body B' for then the proposition would not be contingent, as his theory requires, but analytic. With "my experience" he means a certain class of experiences of a person. It is the sense of this 'my' and 'of' that he requires to deny that, because being 'my experience' is -for the experience in question-no contingent matter but necessary. That my headache is my headache is-for the headache -no contingent matter.

Answer to Q No 8: To get of these difficulties Strawson's suggests acknowledging the concept of person as primitive i.e. as a concept that cannot be analysed further in a certain way to another. That means: " the concept of a person is the concept of a type of entity, such that both predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics, a physical situation are equally applicable to a single individual of that single type" (Strawson). In other words, the states of consciousness cannot be ascribed at all, unless they are ascribed at all, unless they are ascribed to persons (in Strawson's sense) It is to this concept of person, not to the pure ego, that the personal pronoun "I' refers. Thus the concept of a person is logically prior to that of an individual consciousness.

Answer to Q No 9: (a) T (b) F (c) T (d) F (e) T

14.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very short Questions

Q1: What is person?

Q2: Is the concept of person primitive?

Q3: Who introduced No-ownership Doctrine?

Q4: Is person and man same?

B. Short Questions (Write in about 100-150 words)

Q1: Distinguish between Person and Man

Q2: What are the differences between Locke's and Hume's view on Person

Q3: Briefly explain the person and their experience

Q4: What is no-ownership doctrine?

Q5: Distinguish between Descstes' and Strawson's view

C. Long Questions (Write in about 150 words)

Q1: Discuss Locke's view on the concept of person.

Q2: How Hume defines Person? Discuss.

Q3: Explain the concept of Descartes' concept of no-ownership theory.

Q4: Critically discuss Strawson's concept of person.

*** ***** ***