UNIT 10: HUME VIEW ON SELF

UNIT STRUCTURE

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10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- explain Hume's theory of self
- know how Hume has rejected the concept of self
- know what is empiricism
- explain why Hume's theory can also be regarded to be no self theory
- explain the criticisms of Hume's theory of self

10.2 INTRODUCTION:

In this unit, you are going to learn about the David Hume's conception of self. Hume's conception of self can also be regarded to be his conception of mind. This particular concept of Hume is found in his book, "A Treatise of Human Nature (1738-40)". Further he had improved this theory in his letter writings like, "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748)"It is known by us that Hume is an empiricist. According to empiricism knowledge is something, which is derived from the sense experience. So for Hume

self or mind is something, which gather knowledge for the sense experience. By reading and studying this unit, you will be able to gather knowledge about the David Hume's conception of mind or self. You will also be able to know that how Hume had criticized the existence of self. Finally after reading this unit, you will be able to know that there is no self according to Hume.

10.3: HUME'S THEORY OF SELF:

Hume's theory of self is occupying an important place in the modern western philosophy. Hume was an empiricist and he carries empiricism to its extreme logical end. Locke admitted the existence of both mind and matter. So far as Berkeley is concerned, he admitted the existence of the mental substance alone. According to Berkeley, matter and the material substratum does not exist. Everything that exists only in relation to the knowing mind. So the mind or the self (along with its ideas) alone exists. Hume went a step further and rejected the existence of the mind or the self as abiding substance. What exists is a totality of ideas and impressions. Every idea or every impression is discrete. There is no internal connecting bond among these ideas and impressions.

10.4: HUME'S REJECTION OF THE CONCEPTION OF A PERMANENT:

Hume's rejection of the conception of a permanent abiding substance is very famous. In a well known passage Hume wrote ----------

"For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at anytime without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for anytime, as by sound sleep; so long as am I insensible of myself and may truly be said not exist."

9.5: HUME AND EMPIRICISM:

The epistemology of Locke developed through Berkeley and culminated in the philosophy of Hume. According to Andrew Seth Pringle Pattison, the epistemology of Locke ultimately culminated in the philosophy of Hume in the form of a theory, which may be called idea-ism. According to this theory ideas alone exist. There is nothing other than and over and above the ideas. There is neither material substance nor mental substance. Berkeley's criticism of material substance was directed by Hume against the mental substance as well. Berkeley's had reduced the spiritual substance to complexes of sensations. What we have is a series of ideas and impressions. There is no abiding permanent substance whether mental or material.

10.6: NO SELF THEORY OF HUME:

According to Hume, every genuine idea must ultimately be derived from some impression. There is no impression from which the idea of the self is derived. Moreover, Hume argued that there is no introspective evidence for the existence of a permanent soul.

According to Hume, what we have is impressions and ideas. Impressions are livelier and more vivid than the ideas and impressions. Our imagination binds together different impressions and ideas and thereby forms the conception of one abiding self.

10.7: CRITICISMS OF HUME'S THEORY OF SELF:

Thus it becomes clear that according to Hume, there is no self. According to the critics, if there is no self then Hume has to explain the illusion of the self. Neither reason nor the senses gives us the self. But imagination is responsible for producing a belief in permanent self. There is only succession of impressions and ideas. An important question arises here, i.e. there must be an idea or an impression which rises above the series and mental

substratum. Which impression or idea can rise above the series and form the idea of a mental substratum. Which impression or idea can rise above the series and form the idea of a mental substance? Again how can one impression or idea rise above the series? To this two questions Hume did not have a clear answer.

Kant said that Hume looked for the self in the wrong place. Therefore Hume did not find the self. The self is not one object among the other object. Therefore the self cannot be found through introspection. For Kant it is the ultimate pre-supposition of knowledge. It is the primal knower. Hume's account fails to take note of this important point.

10.8: CONCLUSION:

So this in brief about the Hume's view on self or mind. When Hume said about self, unlike other philosophers, he has totally rejected the existence of self or mind. According to him there is not anything like self. Hume's theory of self is itself a very unique theory. So far as Hume's theory is concerned, it has some similarities with Buddhism. According to Buddhist notion of not-self, which holds that the unitary self is a fiction and that nothing exists but a collection of five aggregates. Similarly, both Hume and Buddhist philosophy hold that it is perfectly acceptable to speak of personal identity in a mundane and conventional way, while believing that there are ultimately no such things. So far as Hume's theory of self is concerned, it is actually better to be regarded to be not-self theory of Hume, as Hume has strongly rejected the existence of self. So from the above discussion, it can be said that though Hume's theory of self has a different flavour, but it is playing a very dominant role in western philosophy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q No 1: Who is the author of the book entitled, "Treatise of Human Nature"?

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Q No 2: According to which philosopher matter and the material substratum do not exist?

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Q No 3: Who has given the concept of idea-ism?

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Q No 4: Who has reduced the spiritual substance to complexes of sensations?

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Q No 5: Who said that every genuine idea must ultimately be derived from some expressions?

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Q No 6: According to Hume, what is livelier and more vivid than the ideas?

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Q No 7: Does Hume explain the illustration of the self?

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Q No 8: Do you think reason or senses give us the sensations?

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Q No 9: Who said that Hume looked for the elf in the wrong place?

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Q No 10: Hume's theory of self has similarities with which Indian theory?

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9.9: LET US SUM UP

- Hume's conception of self can also be regarded to be his conception of mind.
- According to empiricism knowledge is something, which is derived from the sense experience. So for Hume self or mind is something, which gather knowledge for the sense experience.
- Locke admitted the existence of both mind and matter.
- So far as Berkeley is concerned, he admitted the existence of the mental substance alone.
- According to Berkeley, matter and the material substratum does not exist. Everything that exists only in relation to the knowing mind. So the mind or the self (along with its ideas) alone exists.
- Hume went a step further and rejected the existence of the mind or the self as abiding substance
- Berkeley's criticism of material substance was directed by Hume against the mental substance as well.
- Berkeley's had reduced the spiritual substance to complexes of sensations
- According to Hume, every genuine idea must ultimately be derived from some impression.
- There is no impression from which the idea of the self is derived. Moreover, Hume argued there is no introspective evidence for the existence of a permanent soul.
- According to the critics, if there is no self then Hume has to explain the illusion of the self.

- According to Buddhist notion of not-self, which holds that the unitary self is a fiction and that nothing exists but a collection of five aggregates.
- So far as Hume's theory of self is concerned, it is actually better to be regarded to be not-self theory of Hume, as Hume has strongly rejected the existence of self.



10.10: FURTHER READING

1. Thilly, Frank, A History of Philosophy, Central Publishing House, Allahabad.
2. Masih, Y., A Critical History of Western Philosophy (Greek, Medieval, Modern), Motilal Banarsidass Publishers private limited, Delhi.
3. Wright, M.R., Introducing Greek Philosophy, Routledge.
4. Stace. W.T. A Critical History of Greek Philosophy, MacMillan and Co. limited, London.



10.11: ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Ans to Q No 1: David Hume

Ans to Q No 2: Berkeley

Ans to Q No 3: Andrew Seth Pringle Pattison

Ans to Q No 4: Berkeley

Ans to Q No 5: David Hume

Ans to Q No 6: Impressions

Ans to Q No 7: No

Ans to Q No 8: No

Ans to Q No 9: Kant

Ans to Q No 10: Buddhism

10.12: MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions:

1) Who has written the book "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding"?

2) Who admitted the existence of both mind and matter?

3) Who rejected the existence of the mind or self?

4) Define empiricism.

5) How the conception of abiding self forms?

B. Short Questions:

1) Write a short note on Hume's rejection of the conception of permanent.

2) Write a short note on Hume and Empiricism.

3) Briefly explain the 'no self theory of Hume'

4) Write a short note on the criticisms of the self.

C) Long Questions:

1) Explain why Hume's theory of self is regarded to be no-self.

2) Discuss the Hume's concept of self or mind.

3) Critically discuss the Hume's theory of self.

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