UNIT 4: NEO–REALISM

Unit Structure

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4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- explain Neo-Realism as theory of Reality
- define Epistemological Monism
- discuss the relation of Neo-Realism to Naïve Realism

4.2 INTRODUCTION

In the history of Philosophy, 'Reality' or the object of knowledge has been conceived and propounded in different ways by different thinkers giving rise to different theories of Reality.

Realism as a theory, holds that the object of knowledge exists independently of the mind. The general tenet of Realism is that, whatever is, is real in the sense that it has being and functions as something out there independently of any mind. But Realism admits of various types and degrees because the object may be held to be either wholly independent of mind and distinct from the mind or to be partly so, and to different extents.

The realistic attitude, that objects of knowledge has extra mental existence is not a new one in philosophy. Realism, says the realist, is the instinctive belief of man and it is, therefore, as old as man. Modern realism

draws its sustenance from the different forms of ancient realism. Modern Realism has flourished mostly in America and Great Britain.

Neo-Realism is a movement in philosophy representing modified form of realism. This new realist movement developed largely as a protest against the Absolute Idealism of the 19th Century and against the absurd claims of subjective idealism or solipsism, taken as the basis of the Absolute Idealism. In 1912, six prominent American realists, namely, Edwin Bissell Holt, Walter Taylor Marvin, William Pepperell Montague, Ralph Barton Perry, Walter Boughton Pitkin and Edward Gleason Spaulding jointly published a book with the title 'The New Realism' in which they expounded and defended a form of realism which differed in certain fundamental respects from the older varieties of realism.

4.3 NEO-REALISM OR NEW REALISM

Neo-Realism is one of the Chief forms of Realism prevalent in America. The Neo-Realism or New Realism is primarily a doctrine concerning the relation between the knowing process and the thing known. Holt, Marvin, Montague, Perry, Pitkin and Spaulding, the six authors of the book 'The New Realism' advocates direct realism and believes in the presentative theory of perception. "Objects are not represented in consciousness by ideas; they are themselves directly presented." According to Neo-Realism, external objects are directly perceived as independent of and external to the mind. Objects are not perceived through the medium of ideas. The external objects exist independently of being perceived by any mind. They are not mind-dependent. They are independent of mind, - finite or infinite.

Neo-Realism, while it insists like all realism that things are independent, also asserts that when things are known they become immediate objects of knowledge. Things enter directly into the mind and are technically called "sensa" or immediate objects of knowledge. The immediate objects of knowledge or perception – "sensa", for example, a rap of a sound heard, or a patch of colour seen are conceived as physical. So external things are nothing else than sensa in a certain relation. The sensa are not subjective.

But the crux of neo-realism is the relation between the sensa and the physical object or thing independent of mind. The direct object of man's perception is not the table (physical reality) but certain sensa – hardness, brown colour, a certain shape etc. If the sensa are parts of the physical reality, then the same table must possess contradictory sensa as its real parts, for the table looks rectangular from one point of view and square from another. But the table cannot be the sum of contradictory sensa. It may then be said that the sensa are produced by the table in the mind and thus the physical reality is the cause of sensa. This clearly leads to the representationalism of Locke who inferred the existence of external reality as the cause of sensations. The sensa then are not physical, but the reflections of the physical reality on man's mind. Man can know only the sensa and not the physical object which is external.

Moreover, some critics point out that knowledge of objects is not as immediate and direct as thought by the Neo- realists. The object of immediate perception cannot be external physical reality. For example, a man with normal eyesight see a flower red and a colour blind man perceives it as grey. If the colour is physical then the flower must be red and grey at the same time, which is absurd. Sensa as physical cannot explain the phenomena of error, illusion and the experience of seeing double.

Some neo-realists try to say that dream objects, illusory appearances, hallucination etc are not subjective but belong to the same physical world as percepts and are equally objective; they are, of course, entities subsisting in addition to ordinary physical objects. For example, when a person perceive snake in a rope, the rope has existence in space and time, but the snake does not. The snake is not existent, since it does not exist in space and time, but the snake has subsistence.

The Neo-realists point out that the world of objectivity is not exhausted by the world of existence. The objective world is the world of subsistence and the world of existence is only a part thereof. Whatever is existent is subsistent but not vice-versa. Neo-realists take up this distinction between existence and subsistence to safeguard the objectivity of illusory content. The illusory objects do not exist in time and space like real physical things.

But they are as good objects of experience as physical things and subsist in the all-inclusive universe of being. Thus to be objective and to be real are not the same thing. Similarly, to be false does not mean to be subjective. As E.B.Holt, remarks, “The gist of realism is not to insist that everything is real , far from it, but to insist that everything that is, is and is as it is.” Thus in Neo-realism the false object is found to be an unreal and yet objective entity.

But the contention of the neo-realists that there may be subsistent entities which have no spatio-temporal existence are fanciful. Whether things are subsistent or existent entities, they must be thought of by minds. Moreover, dreams, illusions and hallucinations cannot be objective. These are subjective, since they are different in different individuals.

Neo-realism conceives of all relations as external. Relations are external to the things related. The world is an aggregate of things externally related to one another. The world is not universe but multiverse. Relations are objective and do not depend on mind. They are not subjective creations of the mind; they are independent of mind. Space, time, causality are real and existent. The Neo-Realist do not consider the world as expression of the Absolute. Neo-realism believes in pluralistic Universe.

Critics point out that all relations are not external. Some relations are internal. Matter, Space, and time are inseparable from one another. They are the matrix of the physical universe. There are internal relations among them. Within these internal relations there are external relations among certain things. For example, conjunction between my hand and a pen is an external relation.

Neo-realism is intellectualistic and analytic. It believes in the method of intellectual analysis and intelligibility of the world. Intellect can understand the nature of the world. Neo-realism supports analysis as the only method to follow in philosophical investigation. E.G. Spaulding defends “analysis as a method of knowing , which discovers entities or parts which are real in quite the same sense as are the wholes which are analysed.” The wholes and the parts both are real. Analysis does not falsify them. It simply discovers the parts which exist in the wholes. This position is called ‘Analytical Realism’.

The most notable feature of Neo-Realism is what W.T. Marvin calls "the emancipation of metaphysics from epistemology". This means that the nature of things is not to be sought primarily in the nature of knowledge, but things must be studied in the objective way, in their objective setting. Epistemology neither gives any theory of reality nor solves any metaphysical problem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. What is the name of the book published by the six American realists?

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Q2. What is the technical name for immediate objects of knowledge, according to the Neo-realists?

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4.4. EPISTEMOLOGICAL MONISM

The main epistemological question is : whether the object perceived is numerically identical with (i.e. one and the same entity as) the object as it is (unperceived). Neo-realism answers the question in the affirmative, holding that the two are one. They say that "the content of knowledge, that which lies in or before the mind when knowledge takes place, is numerically identical with the thing known." "In other words, things when consciousness is had of them become themselves contents of consciousness; and the same things thus figure both in the so-called external world and in the manifold which introspection reveals." This view, that the object known and the object as it is are one and the same, is known as epistemological

monism. It is opposed to epistemological dualism according to which the object known and the object as it is are two entities.

As Neo-Realism or New Realism favours epistemological monism, it tries to show that knowing does not change the object, but grasps it as it exists independently. Thus, as Neo-Realism is based on what Perry calls 'epistemological monism' it does away with the distinction between ideas and things. These two are not different from one another in so far as their contents are concerned but they differ only as belonging to two different groupings. Just as the same person may be a member of two or more different associations, so the same content may form an element of the external world when it is viewed under one set of relations and may also be the part of the world of ideas when viewed under a different set of relations. The aim of the neo-realists is to abolish the subjective and to interpret mental phenomena in an objective relational manner. E.B.Holt defines consciousness as the cross-section of the universe defined by the specific response of the nervous system. Thus, consciousness is not any subjective existence, but only a particular collection of objects defined by the specific response of the organism in relation to the physical environment. It is only a peculiar grouping of a certain objects arranged in a peculiar and definite context. The objects constituting the conscious manifold may yet be members of other manifolds and are really integral parts of the environment from which the collection is made. Thus, according to the neo-realists, knowledge has to be understood exclusively in the language of objects. There is no such thing as consciousness apart from the things of which we are conscious.

The epistemological monism as advocated by the neo-realists involves serious difficulties lurking beneath its apparent simplicity. Neo-realism which holds that the content of knowledge, that which lies in or before the mind when knowledge takes place, is numerically identical with the thing known, completely ignores the distinction between mental act and object as basal to all forms of experience. It reduces consciousness to the level of an object.

If the immediate data of perception are identical with parts of independent physical objects, then how can the same object appear

differently to two or more persons at the same time. Moreover, if the object known is identical with the object as it is, then how can we explain errors and illusions. Neo-realism, therefore owes an explanation of error and illusions.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What is epistemological monism?

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4.5 NAIVE REALISM AND NEO-REALISM

Naïve Realism is also known as popular realism, common sense realism, natural realism, and direct realism. According to Naïve Realism, ideas are exact copies of external real things and their qualities. All the qualities of matter are real and objective existences in nature; they exist in things themselves. Thus colour, taste, smell, heat and cold are as much absolute and objective qualities of things extension, impenetrability, motion, rest solidity and the like are . Amongst the primary qualities are extension, impenetrability, motion, inertia and the rest. Among the secondary qualities are colour, taste, smell, temperature etc. Matter and all their qualities exist, and are known by the mind. The primary qualities are independent of our congnitions and the secondary qualities are dependent on them.

Neo-realism like Naïve realism also holds that primary qualities, secondary qualities, and tertiary qualities are real and objective. None of them are merely subjective ideas of the mind. So Neo-realism agrees with naïve realism, which regards extension, solidity, rest and motion (primary

qualities), color, sound, taste, smell, heat and cold (secondary qualities), and beauty and ugliness (tertiary qualities), as objective and real.

Naïve Realism conceives of objects as directly presented to consciousness and being precisely what they appear to be. Objects are not represented in consciousness by ideas, they are themselves directly presented . Consciousness is like a beam of light which shines through the sense-organs and illuminates the world just as it is.

Like Naïve Realism, Neo-Realism also advocates direct realism and believes in the presentative theory of perception. “Objects are not represented in consciousness by ideas; they are themselves directly presented.”

Naïve realism as a theory of Reality is however handicapped by its failure to explain error, illusions etc. Naïve realism can hardly explain the phenomena of dreams, hallucinations, reveries and double visions. The objects of experience in these phenomena cannot be said to exist as real things “out there” in the world. They cannot be material or physical entities. It can be said that they exist only in the minds as ideas or mental states.

Neo-realism which reduces the data of perception to physical existence cannot obviously explain illusory experiences . According to Neo-realism, what is illusory subsists, independently of all experience, but it does not exist in space and time and is therefore unreal. But the difficulty in this view is that it goes against the report of our immediate feeling. An illusory object is perceived by us as existing in space and time and not merely as subsisting in a shadowy world of being.

One of the Neo-realist viz, E.B.Holt ascribes a sort of reality to illusory and hallucinatory objects. Even dreams, illusions and hallucinations are independent of minds; they have real objective existence. But to consider dreams, illusions and hallucinations as objective existence is to go too far towards pan-objectivism, that is, only objects exists. There is no mind, consciousness or subjective existence.

From the above discussion it is seen that Neo-realism is broadly speaking , a return to Naïve or Natural Realism which was abandoned

previously owning to its inability to explain dreams and illusions Thus the relation of Neo-realism to Naïve realism is historically very significant.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What other names by which Naïve Realism is known?

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Q5. What are primary qualities of matter?

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Q6. Does Neo-Realism advocate direct realism?

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4.6 LET US SUM UP

- Neo-Realism is a movement in Philosophy representing modified form of realism. This new Realist movement developed largely as a protest against the Absolute Idealism of the 19th Century.
- Neo-realism or New-realism is primarily a doctrine concerning the relation between the knowing process and the thing known.
- Holt, Marvin, Monatague, Perry, Pitkin and Spaulding the six authors of the book 'The New Realism' advocates direct realism and believes in the presentative theory of perception.

- According to Neo-realism, external objects are directly perceived as independent of and external to the mind. Objects are not perceived through the medium of ideas.
- The Neo-Realists say that even dreams, illusions, hallucinations etc. have objective existence.
- The illusory objects do not exist in time and space like real physical things. But they are as good objects of experience as physical things and subsist in the all-inclusive universe of being.
- Neo-realism conceives of all relations as external. Relations are external to the things related. The world is an aggregate of things externally related to one another. The world is not universe but multiverse.
- Neo-realism is based on what Perry calls 'Epistemological Monism' which does away with the distinction between ideas and things. These two are not different from one another in so far as their contents are concerned but they differ only as belonging to different groupings.
- According to Naïve Realism, ideas are exact copies of external real things and their qualities. All the qualities are real and objective. Neo-Realism agrees with Naïve realism that all qualities – primary , secondary and tertiary are objective and real.
- Neo-realism is, broadly speaking, a return to Naïve realism. The relation of Neo-realism to Naïve realism is historically very significant.



4.7 FURTHER READING

1) Datta, D.M., (1972) *The Chief Currents of Contemporary Philosophy*, Patna: Bharati Bhawan

2) Chakravarthy, D.K. (1993) *Fundamental Questions of Epistemology and Metaphysics*, Guwahati: Manthan Prakash

3) Bhattacharyya, H. M., (1969) *The Principles of Philosophy*. University of Calcutta

4) Sinha, Jadunath, (2009) *Introduction to Philosophy*. Kolkata: New Central Book Agency (P) Ltd.

5) Chakravarti, Sibapada.(1992) *An Introduction to Philosophy*. Calcutta: S.P.Ghose



4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q.No.1. The name of the book published by the six American Realists is 'The New Realism'

Ans to Q.No 2: The immediate objects of knowledge are technically called 'sensa' by the Neo-realists.

Ans to Q.No 3: The view that object known and the object as it is are one and the same.

Ans to Q. No 4: Naïve Realism is also known as Popular realism , Commonsense realism, Natural realism and Direct realism.

Ans to Q.No.5: Extension, solidity, rest and motion are primary qualities of matter.

Ans to Q.No.6: Yes, Neo-realism advocates direct realism



4.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

Q 1: Name the place where Neo-realism flourished.

Q 2: Who are the authors of the book 'The New Realism'?

Q 3: Is Neo-Realism direct or indirect Realism?

Q 4: What is 'Sensa'?

Q 5: What method does the Neo-realists adopt in philosophical investigation?

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

Q 1: Write a short note on ‘Epistemological Monism’

Q 2: Write a short note on Naïve Realism.

Q 3: How do the Neo-realists conceive relation?

C. Long Questions (Answer in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Describe the theory of Neo-Realism

Q 2: Discuss the relation of Neo-Realism to Naïve Realism.

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