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THE TELEOLOGICAL VIEW OF MIND AND CONSCIOUSNESS

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In this paper I will defend the teleological view of mind and consciousness which has been of late out of fashion because of the increasing emphasis on the mechanistic approach to mind and consciousness in the recent philosophy of mind. The new discoveries in cognitive science and the brain sciences in general have led to the belief that all there is to mind is its mechanical functions and the laws operating behind them. This has led to what may be called the disenchantment¹ of the mind and its creative dimensions. This is responsible for the loss of the teleological view of mind and consciousness as a result of which human nature has been explained in mechanistic terms.

I will argue that the teleological view of mind and consciousness is imperative because of the fact that mind operates in a non-mechanical and creative way, making it impossible to map the functions of the mind within a mechanistic model. The right model for explaining the mind and its activities is the teleological one that has been found in the history of the philosophy of mind right from Aristotle to Hegel and beyond. However, the teleological model needs to be examined afresh in view of the contemporary discoveries about the mind and consciousness.

I

Mechanism Versus Teleology: Two Models of Explanation

The two models of explanation which have been handed down in the history of philosophy from Aristotle onwards are mechanism and teleology. Mechanism holds that the only way the phenomena could be explained is by locating their causal mechanisms which underlie them. The mechanistic model explains everything in terms of the mechanical/causal laws because it believes that all the natural

phenomena in general fall under the mechanical laws. The latter are the universal and necessary laws which make the phenomena intelligible². Such being the case, the mechanistic sciences, under the influence of Galileo and Newton, went to the extent of saying that the whole universe could be understood as a huge machine that is operating under the strict laws of nature which can be mapped by mathematics and physics³. This trend in the physical sciences continues to dominate sciences in general, including the mind/brain sciences.

The teleological model of explanation, on the contrary, has been under threat from the mechanistic model because the former has always viewed the universe differently by supposing that the mechanical laws are not enough to explain the universe. There is something more to the universe than the mechanical sciences can dream of and that is that the universe has a core of meaning or intelligibility which is rational⁴ in nature and can be understood only in terms of what Aristotle called the ends or the telos which define the natural phenomena⁵. Of course, it is not easy to decipher the ends of any natural phenomena by mere empirical inspection, but a deeper reflection can always reveal the why and how of the phenomena. That is why there is no scientific respectability to the idea of teleological explanation of nature, let alone of the human nature. Nonetheless, the teleological explanation has a rational validity which needs to be probed further.

Let us understand first why teleology was needed at all as a way of understanding reality. Is it because the world really has a purposive nature and so we cannot avoid the teleological aspects of the world? Or is it only a way of making things fit into a coherent pattern so that we can make sense of the whole domain of reality that otherwise appears puzzling to the naked eyes? The answers to these questions lie in how we approach the questions themselves. If we are realists about the way the world works, we will certainly ascribe some sort of purposiveness to the world-phenomena, and accordingly go with Aristotle in believing that the world is genuinely operating with a purpose, however unintelligible it may be to us in the absence of the so-called scientific evidence. Aristotle was really committed to the view that the world has final causes⁶ which make the world teleological to the core, thus allowing for the fact that no natural process takes place unless it is having an end or goal. Those who do not share Aristotle's world-view are likely to hold that the idea of having ends is too anthropocentric a view to be true of nature in general. Of course, they may concede that human actions have

in a limited sense ends or purposes, but that does not justify any ascription of purposiveness to the cosmic events as well. However, we may have occasion in the following sections to question the non-Aristotelian view as such with regard to the cosmic events though we have no doubt that even the non-Aristotelians will accept that human actions do have a teleological explanation⁷.

II

Limitations of The Mechanistic Worldview

The more we probe the basic presuppositions of the mechanistic worldview, the more we are convinced that it fails to account for the rational order of the world, that is, the over all sense of the world as a cosmic order. Mechanism is alright when it imposes a mechanistic system on the world for making the events in the world fall within a certain pattern. The scientific laws are a case in point which aim at explaining the coherent patterns in the world-events. But beyond the laws, what? If we ask why we have these laws and not any other, the only answer is that they appear true to our intelligence and so are valid as far as our mind goes. Beyond this we can be compelled to say nothing. This has been the position of the modern mechanistic sciences. They have nothing to say about why we have these laws and nothing more. The 'why' question is almost absent from the vocabulary of the empirical sciences across the board. The why questions are left to the philosophers to raise to open up new ways of understanding the world⁸.

Mechanism is a way of postulating strict laws for explaining the natural necessity of the law-like patterns in the universe. Such was the challenge before the scientists in the early days of modern science. They had no clue as to what happens in nature so that it exhibits uniform patterns in the space-time world. The mighty galaxies are mechanically organized so that we can map out their position and distance in the outer space. The physical reality is so enormous that we can hardly say anything about it except within our mathematical compass. That is the reason why modern science is mathematical in its general approach and so evasive about any telos of the world. In fact, for it nothing in nature has a goal or purpose. Everything is factual and contingent and so falls within a mechanistic system. Given the initial conditions of the world, we can map out its future outcomes⁹.

The mechanistic sciences searched for mechanical laws not only

in the realm of the physical world but also in the human world. The naturalism of the mechanistic sort overruled any attempt to differentiate the human world from the natural world¹⁰ because it believed only in one form of naturalism which can unify the entire world that includes the physical objects as well as the human beings. The difference between man and nature was unknown to the early scientists because they thought man is part of the physical world and therefore there cannot be a separate set of laws governing the human world. Aristotle's warning that human nature is distinct and that it obeys its own laws was not heeded to by the mechanistic sciences. The idea of the second nature¹¹ was an anathema to the modern scientists. The result of ignoring man's unique position in the world was disastrous because man was reduced to a physical object in the hands of the materialists of all hues¹².

It is the philosophers under the influence of Aristotle, Kant and Hegel who could realize the fallacy of the naturalistic explanations of the human mind and consciousness. These philosophers who are generally called idealists, rationalists and spiritualists made every effort to mark out a separate place for man in the universe, not by showing that man is a super-natural being but by showing that we need a better way of understanding man's mental activities which constitute the very structure of the human organism. Human organism is a part of the animal kingdom, and yet it has some features which are rational in nature as they are constituted of some extra-physical features like mind and consciousness. Therefore, man is supposed to be a thinking and rational being who lives in nature but is not reducible to the level of natural objects like stones and sticks¹³.

III

Mind and Human Nature

The teleological view of mind and human nature, in general, presents a better view because of the fact that it resists the reduction of man to just physical objects the way the materialists demand. The anti-reductionist stand demands that man be understood as a rational being who can think and reason out things in view of the set goals which are pursued not just for survival but also for a meaningful life. It is the pursuit of meaningful life which is central to the human nature¹⁴. Moreover, it is to be noted that the human beings, on account of being gifted with rational capacities, can create new meanings in science, philosophy, art, religion and literature¹⁵.

This is the idea that is central to the meaning-seeking nature of man which has been well crafted by teleological thinkers, like Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, who have raised man above the level of just biological beings as described by Darwin and others. It is not the case that human beings evolved only as surviving animals on the Earth; human beings did evolve more as social and cultural beings who sought meanings even within their biological nature¹⁶. The life of the Buddha and Jesus and other moral heroes of mankind have demonstrated that life is not a just a biological survival only.

To understand the mental nature of the human beings one has to go beyond the gross physical nature and must include the large domain of social and cultural meanings which have evolved through centuries. This is what is signified by the fact that human beings are basically thinkers, as Descartes emphasized and what idealists like Hegel developed as the rational nature of man. If one takes the Hegelian view of the human reality, one cannot but decipher the teleological view of the evolution of consciousness from the individual to the social and to spiritual consciousness, in a hierarchical order¹⁷. Hegel's phenomenological study of the mind or the spirit¹⁸ is a standing monument of the teleological study of man, society, culture, religion and art. This makes it clear that man cannot be understood unless we place him in the broad frame of an evolving consciousness.

Let us see if such a view of man and the mind fits into our contemporary view of man according to which human beings are more or less biologically evolved beings having cultural and social inclinations. For the contemporary scientific worldview, human nature is more a matter of scientific study which takes man as an animal having a bundle of biological propensities. This view of man completely denudes human nature of anything teleological which cannot be explained mechanically. This is what is generally called the disenchantment of the human nature which means that there is no space of meaning and reasons¹⁹ in human nature beyond what is natural and mechanical. This is the way human beings have lost touch with their inherent nature which is rational and meaning-giving, in the Hegelian terms.

The teleologists have always laid emphasis on the fact that the human beings carry on their life with certain ends and goals and always perform actions with a purpose and according to certain reasons. The human actions, thus, are embedded within reasons so that they can be judged according to the normative standards already laid down²⁰. The normative view of human actions is the

most important aspect of the teleological view of the human mind and nature. Mind is not just a mechanical device of conducting the brain functions, but the total system of normative functions of the mind driven by ends and goals. Mind is a global normative space of reasons and values all set within a well-structured mental system. The Hegelian notion of Reason represents the mind in a better way than the functionalist or materialist view of mind as a set of brain activities²¹.

IV

The Material Mind versus the Teleological Mind

It is interesting to note that the teleological view of the mind and consciousness goes straight against the materialist view of the mind which identifies the mind with brain functions. The latter view of the mind inherits its ontological presuppositions from the early materialists like Hobbes who opposed the Cartesian dualism between the mind and the body. The subsequent materialists made it their sole agenda to denounce the mind as an independent reality and opt for the physical world as reality. This resulted in the mind-body identity theory and all other hard and soft varieties of materialism²². Materialism is well known for its anti-teleological view of mind because it denies that there could be any place for purposiveness in the activities of the mind and other human activities. For the materialists, the mind does not have any residual power above the power of the brain as a physical organism. Everything that we ascribe to the mind in terms of the intentional states are nothing but the brain activities or the brain processes²³. The so-called intentionality of the mind as discovered by the phenomenologists, like Husserl, is either denied completely or only given a secondary status as the intentional stance²⁴. But the fact of the matter is that mind is intentional in the real sense of the term and is endowed with the capacity to make the mental states goal-directed. Intentionality is teleological rather than mechanical and is, thus, made to have contents which can teleologically be mapped.

Another feature of the mind, which is eminently noticed by the phenomenologists, is consciousness and its normative structure²⁵. This structure is what the rationalists call the rationality of the mind. But the phenomenologists go further in discovering the transcendental nature of consciousness because of their commitment to the non-naturalist nature of consciousness and the accompanying Transcendental Ego. These ontological features do

add a teleological dimension to the nature of consciousness because of which we can always make room for a hierarchical division of consciousness. What the transcendental consciousness brings into the picture is the emergence of meaning and normativity within consciousness. This is the greatest discovery of phenomenology as a theory of consciousness.

Like Hegel, Husserl is also a teleologist because he believes that mind and consciousness are propelled by the goal of making the conscious states of the mind overcome their naturalist limitations and emerge into the normative domain of transcendental consciousness²⁶. The latter is a normative domain of immanent teleology that makes consciousness responsive to the inner goal of creative meaningfulness such as in ethics, religion, art and literature. This has been emphasized by the mainstream Husserlians who make the claim that consciousness is defined by a creative flow that knows no worldly boundaries²⁷. We can go further in finding out the ontological structure of human subjectivity within the domain of consciousness. This has made the ontology of subjectivity a new field of research in the contemporary philosophy of mind.

V

Subjectivity, Freedom and Creativity

The subjectivity of the human consciousness which has been the underlying themes of modern philosophy since Descartes has a major role to play in the evolution of the teleological view of the mind in contradistinction with the materialist and the mechanistic view of the mind prevalent in the anti-Cartesian tradition. This made it possible for Kant to make the claim that the self's own discovery of itself in the moral realm is facilitated by the mind's aspiration to rise higher than its worldly condition. The noumenal freedom, which the self enjoys beyond the empirical world, is part of the teleological journey of the self beyond itself and the world. Kant's moral self is the self that enjoys freedom in a realm of transcendence and becomes identical with the noumenal self²⁸. This would not have been possible had the self been condemned to be a part of the natural world the way the materialist wanted.

Freedom, however, does not remain an individual possession because the idea of a community becomes important even for the exercise of freedom. The community of the moral selves becomes the new demand for the possibility of moral actions. Kant's Kingdom of Ends becomes the foundation for Hegel's idea of the moral

consciousness which evolves out of the individual consciousness²⁹. This evolution of the self or spirit is an important indication of the fact that there is no limitation on the evolution of the self for the realization of its freedom. This makes the Hegelian self or spirit evolve continuously till it becomes the universal and absolute spirit. This spiritual evolution of the self is the hallmark of Hegel's teleological spiritual worldview. There is, thus, the culmination of the evolution of the self and the world in the emergence of the absolute spiritual consciousness³⁰.

The creativity of the mind and consciousness is evident in the very idea of the mind evolving into a universal mind and consciousness. This is further accentuated by the need of consciousness making new inroads into the higher reaches of the mind's flourishing. The mind is free to create new realms of meaning in the creative pursuits of philosophy, morality and religion. There is no doubt that mind's own self-making effort is evident in the history of human culture as it takes various turns to reach higher realms of meanings. Bergson has grappled with this problem in his theory of the creative evolution of man's life and consciousness³¹ in which the flow of consciousness takes creative turns in its effort to reach sublime heights in moral and spiritual experience. In this the human will has freedom in creating new meanings without any hindrance from the world because of the ceaseless flow of the creative mind. The Bergsonian *elan vital* gives a vital clue to the inner energy of the mind to evolve into a self-effulgent spiritual consciousness³².

The way self and its will have been given importance in the Enlightenment project of modern philosophy has not been completely rejected by the post-Enlightenment thinkers. The reverberations of the Kantian and the Hegelian thought are noticed in the thoughts of the twentieth century thinkers like Sartre, Heidegger and Wittgenstein. The self is assertively self-conscious in Sartre's existentialism and Heidegger's metaphysics of Being. Freedom is the new slogan of existentialist metaphysics because there lies the new teleology of the mind and consciousness. The aspiration for transcendence might be subdued but it is not completely denied³³.

The self is still struggling to catch a glimpse of its own free creativity in its liberation from the world and its tantrums. Heidegger voices the concern of the self or Dasein to make room for a transcendental mental space for free will which is the hallmark of the self's sojourn in the world. Heidegger's open revolt against the self's bondage is a sign of the fact that transcendence is still the hallmark of the will³⁴.

Wittgenstein's effort to get the self liberated from the world is evident in his idea that the transcendental self³⁵ makes freedom its

hallmark. The self is the new locus of meaning and values because it is completely autonomous in its creation of meanings. This makes the self evolve from its worldly location to its ultimate destination in its spiritual consciousness. Wittgenstein does not deny that self is inclined to make the world its moral counterpart because there is the necessity of the world to realize the moral and spiritual meanings and values.

VI

The Mind and the World: A Teleological Unification

Now the question is: Can the mind and the world share a teleological platform in terms of meanings? The plausible answer is that both the mind and the world share a common destiny so far as the realization of meanings and values is concerned. The meanings are the ends or the values which the mind and the world aspire to realize. This could be known from the fact that the mind creates the values and imposes them on the world for the sake of a possible teleological unification. The unification takes place in the following way. First of all, the mind develops its consciousness on an onward journey which includes its intervention in the world by virtue of moralization of the world events as being part of the cosmic moral order. The cosmos is brought into the circle of the meanings in the effort of the mind to have a moral control over the world³⁶. This is clearly shown in the effort of the idealists to make the world belong to the space of meanings and reasons³⁷ by making it intelligible in terms of the latter. This is the Kantian and the Hegelian way of idealizing the world in terms of moral and spiritual meanings which makes the mind and the world meet in the common goal of pursuing a spiritual journey. The world sheds its physical pretensions and wears the garb of the spiritual meanings, thus making the worldly events fulfill certain goals. It is not that the worldly events themselves are directed by an external teleology as some evolutionists believed³⁸, but by an internal teleology of meaning fulfillment.

The cosmic order cannot be viewed as a mere series of events without any human meaning because the cosmos is interpreted and understood in terms of the human categories. Therefore, there is no way we can detach the cosmos from the human point of view. The human point of view is as important as the God's eye point of view because there is a human as well as non-human way of understanding the cosmos³⁹. It is the human point of view which makes the cosmos meaningful and valuable. Therefore, the teleological view of the

universe cannot be ruled out. Of course, nothing follows from it regarding any superhuman agency setting a goal for the universe. Therefore, there is no demand for predetermination of the universe as it is suggested by the external teleologists. All that is demanded is the way we can make the universe humanly intelligible. The universe is thereby re-enchanted⁴⁰ as meanings are given back to the world which it lost because of the objective mechanistic view of the world. The mechanistic view of the universe has done no service to the world because it takes away everything that could be ascribed to it for making it meaningful to the human beings. It is nonetheless not the case that man is the measure of everything as opined by Protagoras. But it cannot be denied that man measures the values which the world must have in order to be humanly intelligible⁴¹.

The mind and the world can never come together unless we make the mind the space of meanings and reasons, and make the world belong to this space. This has been the dream of philosophy throughout the centuries: to make the world meet the demands of the mind for making meanings relevant to the world. If the world would have been a mere series of mechanically organized events, such a world would have been of no concern to philosophy. That is why, from Plato till now, we are debating whether the world is having a rational and teleological order.

Kant's effort to reconcile the mechanistic and the teleological views of the world aims at a unification of the mind and the world in the sense that he shows that even though the mechanistic laws have a role to play in explaining the world, it is the teleological view of the world which brings in purposiveness⁴² to the cosmic order. The idea of the telos of the world is a matter of human mind's search for coherence and meaning in the world which Kant captures through his analysis of the reflective teleological judgements⁴³. Kant, in a way, achieves the mind-world unification by making the world fulfil the mind's demand for unification and coherence through teleological reflections.

VII

Conclusion

The debate whether mechanism or teleology holds the key to the understanding of the mind and the world is still relevant because we are at the crossroads of the human understanding. The mechanistic worldview has lost its supremacy because there is no way we can escape a teleological view of the mind and the world. We are in need

of a reformulation of the argument in order to see how we must search for a teleological view of the human mind and the world as such.

Notes

1. The idea of dis-enchantment is due to Max Weber who tells us how modern science has led to this situation in which nature has been denied of any human meaning. Dis-enchantment is associated with the loss of meaning and values in the context of the scientific understanding of the world.
2. The mechanistic explanation is basically a causal explanation which is the mainstay of modern science.
3. Edmund Husserl has diagnosed the malaise of modern objectivist science in his *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970).
4. The 'rationality' of the world-order is the way we humans interpret it. It is not necessary that the world has a reason of its own.
5. Aristotle, *Physics*, 2.8.199b 27-9
6. *Ibid.*
7. In philosophy of action, the two dominant models of explanation are the reason-explanations and the causal explanations. The reason-based explanation is the teleological explanation which searches for the goals or the ends which are necessarily associated with actions.
8. Wittgenstein throws light on the limitations of the scientific explanations when he shows that these achieve very little in explaining how the universe works. See his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1961), 6.52.
9. Hempel's D-N model in naturalistic explanation is a representative of the mechanistic model which is based on the idea of natural laws.
10. See John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1994) for a discussion on the difference between two kinds of naturalistic explanations, one for the purely natural events and the second for the human nature.
11. *Ibid.* Human nature is the second nature. The second nature is so called because it is different from the first nature which is what science is concerned with.
12. Materialism is well known for its general assumption that everything is physical in nature and that all laws operating in the universe are physical laws.
13. Materialism suffers from reductionism because it reduces everything to matter and denies that mind is an independent reality. For more discussion on this, see David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search for a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1996).
14. See Owen Flanagan, *The Really Hard Problem: Meaning in a Material World* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, 2008) for a discussion on the centrality of meaning-seeking to the human nature.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press,

- Oxford, 1977) for discussion on the different stages of the evolution of consciousness.
18. Ibid.
 19. Cf. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Lecture II.
 20. Ibid. Cf. Flanagan, op.cit.
 21. Cf. D. Dennett, *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1981) for an anti-Cartesian and anti-Hegelian method of explaining mind and consciousness.
 22. Cf. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* for discussion on the varieties of materialism.
 23. For a discussion on the brain-mind identity theory see J.J.C. Smart, "Sensations and Brain Processes" *Philosophical Review*, 68 (1959): 142-56
 24. See Dennett, *Brainstorms*, op.cit on the idea of intentional stance.
 25. The intentional states are rational and normative according to Husserl. See his *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1931).
 26. The transcendental consciousness, according to Husserl, represents the highest stage of human consciousness because it is free from all the elements of naturalism. See Husserl, *Ideas*. op. cit. See also J.N. Mohanty, *The Possibility of Transcendental Philosophy* (The Nijhoff, Dordrecht, 1985).
 27. Ibid.
 28. See Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. T.K. Abbott (Dover Publications, INC, New York, 2004) for a discussion on the moral self and freedom.
 29. Cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, op. cit. for the evolution of consciousness from the individual to the social stages on the way to absolute consciousness.
 30. Ibid.
 31. See Henry Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Dover Publications, New York, 1998) for the idea of evolution of consciousness as a ceaseless duration.
 32. Ibid.
 33. The idea of transcendence is present in the writings of Sartre and Heidegger. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (Washington Square Press, New York, 1992. See also Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Harper and Row, New York, 1962).
 34. Cf. Heidegger, *The Essence of Human Freedom* (Continuum, London and New York, 2002).
 35. Cf. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* , 5.633 for the idea of a transcendental self.
 36. Ibid.
 37. Cf. McDowell, op.cit.
 38. There is no external teleology which is form inverted mechanism. See Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, op.cit.
 39. See Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why The Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost False* (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2012) for a discussion on the possibility of a teleological explanation of the universe.
 40. Cf. McDowell, op.cit.
 41. Nagel, op.cit.
 42. See Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2002), Part II, sections 66-68.
 43. Ibid.