



DISCOVERY SERIES – SESSION FIVE

Existence, Identity, and Reductionism

1. The Nature of Existence

Five Traits that a good theory of existence ought to have:

- 1) Needs to be consistent with and explain what actually does and does not exist
- 2) Needs to be consistent with and explain what could have existed but either does not exist or is not believed to exist
- 3) Must allow for the fact that existence itself exists. It cannot be self-refuting
- 4) Must not violate the fundamental laws of logic (e.g. square circle)
- 5) Must allow for the existence of acts of knowing

Plato and Descartes hold that existence is a property in the same sense that “redness” is a property. Kant said that when you think of a ball that is red, it adds to your conception to be told that the color is red. However, it does not add to your conception to be told that the ball exists. Put differently, saying that a ball is red tells us something about the character of the ball. However, saying that the ball is real simply tells us that it exists.

Kant’s view has three positives:

- (1) it meets all five traits that the good theories of knowledge should have.
- (2) A description of what something is does not tell us that it actually exists
- (3) there is a fundamental difference between essence (whatness) and existence (thatness).

A. Final Observation – Coming to be and Perishing

1. When something comes into existence, there must be at least one property that belongs to that thing. When something ceases to be, it no longer has any properties whatever.
2. The history of philosophy brings to the table what is commonly termed “modes of being.” According to this view, being is a general category and existence is just one kind or mode of being.

2. The Nature of Identity

When speaking about identity, usually one of these four issues is in mind.

- 1) When x and y are contemporaneous, what is it for x to be identical to y? In general, what is it for anything to be identical to itself?
- 2) When x and y are noncontemporaneous, what is it for x to be the same entity as y? Are they continuants? Do they remain the same through change, and if so, how are we to understand what accounts for this?
- 3) What evidence do we have that enables us to know that a given x and y are identical?
- 4) What are the different kinds of identity statements?
 - A. Leibniz's Law of the Indiscernability of Identicals: "Everything is what it is and not something else."
 - B. Identity differs from inseparability. The four legs of a chair are inseparable as long as they are joined to that chair, but each is different as an individual leg.

2. Replacement and Reductionism

As humans, we are interested in what is real. Important intellectual debates rage about the existence of God, the soul, values, and life after death, just to name a few. Sometimes a change is made from one theory to another theory. This is replacement. We must also consider reductionism.

- 1) Linguistic reductionism – This occurs when language that uses one vocabulary or set of terms is replaced with language that uses another vocabulary or set of terms. This can be seen in a shift toward political correctness.
- 2) Strong Ontological Reductionism – One entity is reduced to another entity ("Pain is a certain brain state.")
- 3) Weak Ontological Reduction – An entity becomes supervenient to another entity. (For example, wetness is reduced to the molecular structure of a group of water molecules).

Conclusion: In sum, debates about the reality insist on the one side that there are entities that are only physical. There is, however, more to a physical object than its chemical and physical aspects.