

Philosophy - 2023

Q No 8:-

Give critical exposition of Berkeley's doctrine of *Esse Est Percipi*.

Ans:-

1) Introduction:-

George Berkeley was an Irish philosopher, who is renowned for his philosophy of epistemology. He was an empiricist but some critics regard him as not a true empiricist due to his firm belief on existence of God. Throughout his life, Berkeley was engaged in proposing some critical philosophical insights on nature of mind, reality and existence of God. His famous theory is "*Esse est Percipi*", which implies that 'to be is to be perceived'. He believed in ideas and minds as the ultimate reality of world. Being a proponent of immaterialism, his philosophy revolves around subjective idealism and the truth of realities of existence of material objects in the world. He was of the view that material objects are not true reality in fact, they are dependent on the interpretation of mind.

However, his theory was criticized by many philosophers as being too subjective and idealistic.

2) Critical Exposition of Berkeley's Lecture of *Esse Est Percipere*:-

a) Nature of existence:-

Berkeley was of the view that material objects exist as long as they are perceived by someone. As soon as perception stops, things cease to exist. If there is a tree outside one's house, it will not exist if someone is not perceiving it. Thus, the existence of things depends upon the perception of an observer.

b) Three levels of knowledge:-

- ① Sensual experience
- ② Imagination and reasoning
- ③ Intuition

According to Berkeley, there are three levels

of knowledge and each type depends on the ability of observe to interpret these levels of knowledge.

The lowest level of knowledge is sensual experience, which we see through our eyes or hear from our ear.

Similarly the middle level of knowledge is reasoning, which we acquire through forming an opinion or judgement about the things which we perceived in mind. eg seeing an apple and thinking how would it taste.

Lastly, the highest level of knowledge is intuition, which is formed by having an inner and gut feeling of some divine being - such knowledge is imparted through our intuitions. In short, it is the knowledge which God ~~is~~ reveals upon its people. It is the highest level of knowledge as per Berkeley.

c) God as ultimate Perceiver:-

In order to address criticism on Berkeley's philosophy of 'Esse est Percipere', he defended his

argument on existence of material world by positing that material world does not cease to exist, if there is no perceiver because God is ultimately perceiving this material world all the time. Therefore, there is still in place outside of one's house because God is perceiving it.

d) Limitness of Human Knowledge:-

Berkley's believed that human knowledge is limited due to constraints of their senses.

As sense of touch, feel, hear, taste and smell is subjective, dependant and varies from person to person. Therefore, human cannot know a certain thing in its entirety.

There is always a lacking in human knowledge. Only true knowledge is the one, which is available through intuition.

e) God as final revealer of knowledge:-

Therefore, human can know those things,

which God wants human to have understanding of. Berkeley was staunch believer in the finality of knowledge revealed by God. That knowledge is true knowledge and eternal.

f) Highly skepticism of knowledge :-

Even if humans know something or claim to have understanding of outside world, world of numbers, they cannot understand the complexities of that world. Human knowledge is fallible, only God's knowledge is infallible.

g) Soul is imperishable and body is perishable :-

Berkeley strongly believed in transcendental world. He was of the view that human body is perishable, therefore the material world is not real but temporary illusion. He emphasized on imperishability of human soul.

h) Subjective Idealism:-

Berkely is known for his theory of immaterialism and subjective idealism. According to him, human minds and ideas are the most substantial element of human body. It is because mind is imperishable. Also, ideas in our mind hold significance due to their universality. Things or material objects are not important as long as some mind does not perceive it and form ideas in them.

3) Criticism of Berkeley's theory:-

a) Ideas are important but objects are equally important:-

Critics view Berkeley theory as being too subjective. Ideas vary from person to person but the reality of objects are constant throughout. For instance, everyone will agree on the mass, size and solidity of apple but everybody will not agree on the taste and sweetness of apple. Therefore, it provides one-sided view.

b) Too much subjectivity leads to skepticism:-

If everything depends on the perceiving ability of perceiver, how would consensus be driven on objective things. It provides or lays the groundwork for ubiquitous skepticism.

c) Morality becomes a subjective matter:-

In such societies, where people rely on ideas, reasoning and self-explanatory models for cultural and ethical norms, morality becomes an extensive subject of subjectivity, leading people to indulge in immoral means and justifying it with their ideas.

d) Intellectual Paralysis of society:-

Society falls into a pit of intellectual crisis disaster, where god is regarded responsible for all the knowledge and discoveries.

f) leads to scientific innovation downfall

Intuitionism leads to people believe in only knowledge imparted by God. Individuals impedes

their progress on innovation and discoveries as they believe that all their knowledge is uncertain and limited.

g) It leads to fatalism:-

Individual believe that all their actions are ultimately guided by god and they have minimum hold of their destiny. Therefore, it pushes people under the shade of ignorance and passivism towards progress and creativity.

Conclusion:-

In a nutshell, Berkeley's theory of *Esse est percipie* posits that human's have limited knowledge, mind and ideas are the ultimate spiritual elements, god is ultimate percipior of the world and intuitionism is higher form of knowledge. This makes Berkeley against the norms of ^{being} empiricist and; therefore, is not a true empiricist. His high regard for God and limitness of human knowledge and subsequent skepticism make the theory of *Esse est percipie* not convincing and all-embracing.