



## Anaxagoras: The Mind-Body Problem

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### Abstract

Anaxagoras briefly discusses the nature of mind and matter. According to him mind was omniscient, omnipotent, thinnest and the ruler of the universe. The matter was quite alien from mind. However, he did not propose any specific theory on mind-body relation like modern western thinkers such as Descartes. The fundamental purpose of the study is to explain the nature of relation between these two opposite beings as well as to examine the authenticity of the remark of Aristotle and Karl R. Popper concerning the mind-body dualism. The philosophy of Anaxagoras suggested the clues that there is a ruler-ruled relation between mind and body and the relation is mechanical in nature. The remarks of Popper and Aristotle may not be certainly true. In the present study the critical as well as analytic method are used to explain the fragments and the views of the commentators on this particular topic. The limitation of this study is the translated documents used as supporting materials.

**Keywords:** *Mind-Body dualism, Mind- Body relation, Soul, Mind, Body*

### 1. Introduction

There are endless controversies regarding the concept of mind as well as mind-body relation. Many philosophers have been trying to suggest a permanent solution of the existing disagreements in their own ways. However, they have not been able to do so as their suggestions have been got other one. For example, Descartes, who has tried to give a satisfactory explanation of the mind-body problem and has highlighted how the mind and body interact to each other. Although he has failed to provide the satisfactory explanation that how an unextended thing (Mind) acts upon an extended thing (Body). However, it cannot be assumed that the mind-body problem is inexplicable.

It seems that the mind and body is opposite in nature. The body is inert, perceivable, extended etc. On the contrary the mind is part less, imperceptible, immaterial etc. Even if these two beings are independent but they have a relation. In this regards one thing needs to clear that all the thinkers do not think so such as materialist thinkers. The materialists do not make any natural distinction between mind and body. They do not believe in the independent existence of mind as a distinct being. They have been believed the mind is nothing more than brain and the mental states and brain states are alike. Here it is not important that what the materialists and substance dualists have thought concerning the mind and body and their relation. It is the matter of consideration that what the pre-Socratic thinker, Anaxagoras (500–428 BC) thought regarding the mind-body and their relation. So it is not the subject of inquiry that what the modern philosophers think about the mind but Anaxagoras in the beginning of philosophy.

Anaxagoras is absolutely different from other the pre-Socratics. He does not suggest the same like other pre-Socratics concerning mind as well as mind-body relation. We get find completely different kind of the concept of mind in the extant fragments of Anaxagoras. Perhaps he is the first pre-Socratic who proposed the discussion of mind like modern western thinkers such as Descartes.

The aim of the present study is to provide a meaningful analysis of the concept of mind and matter of Anaxagoras and what Anaxagoras thinks concerning their relation. Some authors have been discussed on the concept of mind and matter of Anaxagoras. One thing is clear from surviving literature that

Anaxagoras has made a sharp distinction between mind and matter. However, it is unknown that what kind of relation he has considered between these two opposite things.

## 2. Review of literature

We are more familiar with the explanation of the modern western philosophers regarding the mind-body problem rather than the pre-Socratics. Actually there is a lack of the available literature concerning the mind-body problem of the pre-Socratics. However, it is not that the pre-Socratics are unaware regarding the mind-body problem. Most of the authors have been just informed the remarks of the pre-Socratics on the concept of mind. However, they have overlooked it that what the pre-Socratics actually have been thought concerning the mind-body problem. Karl R. Popper (1977) first has tried to provide an overview about the history of mind-body problem. He has claimed the mind-body dualism was primarily found in the writings of Homer and later Greek authors. On the contrary Aristotle does not agree to credit of the mind-body distinction to all the classical Greek thinkers rather than Hermetimus.

As far as we know there are no study regarding the mind-body relation of Anaxagoras. However, there are many discussions concerning the concept of mind of Anaxagoras such as A.W.H. Adkins (1970), J. Burnet (1930), E. Rohde (1925), R.D. Mckirahan, (2011), Edward Zeller (1881) and so on. All these authors have suggested a similar type of explanation of the concept of mind and matter of Anaxagoras. As most of the authors have suggested the same, the list of literature has not been extended here.

## 3. Objectives of the study

The purpose of the present study is to find out the answer of the following queries:

1. To examine what Anaxagoras actually thought on mind.
2. To examine what Anaxagoras thought concerning the nature of matter.
3. To search the nature of mind-body relation.
4. To critically examine the remark of Aristotle and Karl R. Popper concerning the mind-body distinction.

## 4. Method and Materials

The fragments and comments concerning Anaxagoras cited in the translated books and the English books related to the present study are recognised as the reliable sources of the relevant discussion. The analytic and critical method has used to analyse and critically examine the materials for finding the truth concerning the views of Anaxagoras on mind-body dualism.

## 5. Result and Discussion

### 5.1 Nature of Mind

The pre-Socratics have used the Greek term *Nous* as the synonym of the English word *Mind* or *Intellect*. All the pre-Socratics do not suggest the same concerning the mind. It varies from school to school even philosopher to philosopher. It is said that some of the pre-Socratics such as Pythagoras, consider the mind as an independent part of soul. Some authors such as Cyril Bailey suggest Democritus does not make any distinction between mind and soul. It is common belief among the pre-Socratics that the mind is a rational faculty. None of the pre-Socratic except Democritus does use the term mind and soul synonymously like the modern western philosophers.

Most interesting thing is the pre-Socratics do not regard the mind as the seat of emotions as the modern western dualist philosophers. Actually the substance dualists have believed the mind contains all the mental states. However, the pre-Socratics do not think so. They do believe *thymos* is responsible for our emotions. It is an independent being and located in the heart. So, it may recognise

the pre-Socratics have believed the mind and soul is etymologically, functionally and spatially differ from each other.

It is quite often said Democritus does not make any distinction between mind and soul. To explain the cause of identification of soul and mind says the mind is as materially as soul. This kind of argumentation is not acceptable. For there are lot of things which are materially alike but neither we recognise them as identical nor those are identical in reality. We use gold to make ring and necklace. These two ornaments are materially same but are not identical. We do not use the ring and necklace for the same purpose also. So the substantial identity always may not imply the sameness of two different things. The law of identity also suggests the same. According to the law of identity an individual object or person is identical with itself. The law of identity does not emphasis on the material cause to explain the identity of a thing.

Some of the pre-Socratics suggest the soul and mind are two distinct being. This is why they have suggested the presence of mind and soul in two different places. According to them head is the seat of mind and heart is the seat of soul. However, all the pre-Socratics do not follow the same to make the distinction between mind and soul. Pythagoras was one of them who do not suggest the spatial differences of soul and mind. He does think the mind is a rational part of soul and the agent of all kinds of rational thinking. It is clear that even if he does not recognise the presence of soul and mind in two different places but considers the functional difference between them. Anaxagoras recognises that the mind is an independent being, the ruler of everything, finest, unmixed, omniscient, omnipotent etc.

According to Anaxagoras mind is the ruler of everything. He thinks if it considers that the mind is mixed with the matter, it is not possible to define the mind as the ruler of everything. Perhaps Anaxagoras thinks if it considers that the mind is an element of a mixture, the superiority of the mind become fade. This is why he has been concluded the mind is mixed with nothing. To avoid the same difficulties he also does not recognise the seed as the begetter of mind as the existing things of the world. He thinks the mind is not only ruled the whole universe but also those who possess the soul. "... Mind rules all things that possess soul – both the larger and the smaller" (Mckirahan, 2011). There is no problem to assume that the mind is superior to all things and possess infinite power. It does not matter whether the ruled is animate or inanimate being. Otherwise it becomes impossible for mind to rule the universe and those who have not possessed the mind.

From this assertion it may deduce Anaxagoras has also made a distinction between *nous* and *psychelike* other pre-Socratics. Other thing is he has never been regarded the *nous* as the part of soul like other pre-Socratics, such as Pythagoras. The difference is that he does believe in the independent existence of mind. The other important feature of the mind is its Omnipotence and Omniscience. From the mentioned account of the nature of mind is clear that Anaxagoras has been believed in the divinity of mind.

This kind of assertion would lead to a complexity. For he proposes the mind is multiple in numbers and he also does believe in the homogeneity of mind. "Every *Nous* is homogeneous, a larger as well as a smaller one..." (Cleve, 1949). If it asserts the mind is divine, says all the minds are divine as all the minds are homogeneous. However, it is contradictory to our experiences. For we have been experienced an individual mind has no power to regulate the whole universe as well as its existing things like divine mind. However, Anaxagoras considers the homogeneity of minds. So it seems these remarks cannot go together. Perhaps this kind of contradictory is apparent. If it says that the differences between the minds are in degree but not in kind, the difficulty becomes reduces. Moreover, this kind of assertion does not go against the Anaxagoras as he does not assume the divine mind as god.

Somebody may ask if all the minds are homogeneous, it says an individual mind is also able to control the universe and its existing things like the divine mind. But why an individual mind is unable to do so in real life. It is true that the individual minds are the fellow of divine mind and have not the same capabilities as divine mind. They are not as omniscient and omnipotent as divine mind. However, it has been proven that the individual minds are able to acquire the knowledge of everything and capable to mastery over the existing things of the phenomenal world. As the individual minds can transform into the divine mind so there is no problem to consider the homogeneity of the mind. So, it may suggest both the divine mind and the individual mind have the knowledge and control over the material world.

It is often said the *logos* endowed reason and everything happens in the world according to *logos*. “The logos, ... the rationale by which the world works... In some sense it is both Heraclitus’ own theory or argument and also the measure which governs the process in the world...” (Osborne, 2004). The mind and logos are also functionally little bit similar to each other. However Heraclitus does not regard the *logos* as human mind or divine mind but the law of universe.

From the discussion of the concept of mind of Anaxagoras may assume he does believe in the immaterial nature of mind. However, it is matter of consideration that how much he succeeds to do so. Zeller has been believed Anaxagoras intentionally tries to talk about the incorporeal thing but basically he has failed to do so. “Zeller holds, indeed, that Anaxagoras mean to speak of something incorporeal; but he admits that he did not succeed in doing so . . .” (Burnet, 1930). However, Adkins is certain about it.

That Anaxagoras’ *Nous* or Mind, which he invoked as the ordering principles in his cosmos, was merely a very fine material, is notorious. To say ‘materialist’, however, implies the existence of an opposed ‘immaterialist’; and there is no indication that anyone at this period, philosopher or no, had a concept of the immaterial. For we may not say that Anaxagoras, terming mind ‘the finest and purest of all things’, was, with the inadequate concepts available, really asserting that mind is immaterial. (Adkins, 1970)

Anaxagoras is the first pre-Socratic philosopher who makes a clear distinction between matter and mind. However, Karl R. Popper has been tried to establish that the mind-body distinction already prevails in the writings of Homer and later Greek authors. “... mind-body dualism is in evidence everywhere in Homer and of course in later Greek authors” (Popper and Eccles, 1977). There is a little bit doubt about the certainty of the remark of Popper on the history of mind-body dualism.

Sometimes it happens that the same term has used in philosophy and in literature but in different sense. For an example *theist*, the literal meaning of that term is who believes in God. The same has been used in Indian philosophy but not in the same sense. It has been used in Indian philosophy in a particular sense. Somebody is to be considered as *theist* in Indian philosophy who does believe in Veda. On the contrary a literary always may not use the terms in his/her writings in philosophical sense. However, when the same literary composes any philosophical essay he/she obviously uses the terms in philosophical sense as philosopher. Karl R. Popper has been cited Homer’s “Odyssey” as an example. He shows Homer discusses there on mind-body relation. “All doubts, and fears, thus banished from my mind” (Homer, 1665). It is certain Homer uses the term mind in “Odyssey” but the use of a term in the writing does not imply that the term has used in philosophical sense. It may be Homer does use the term ordinary sense. This kind of assertion is relevant as the “Odyssey” is not a philosophical writing but the “Odyssey” is an epic poem.

Furthermore, the ordinary people as well as literary has been used the term mind. However, it cannot be said those people are also aware about the mind-body problem. The common people actually use the term mind casually. In this regard somebody may argue that Homer is a property dualist. This kind of argumentation also is not right as he does not claim anywhere in his writings that mind is nothing other than mental states. On the contrary it cannot also be said he is a substance dualist as he does not unveil what he actually thinks of on the nature of mind. Furthermore, the mentioned quotation does not claim the independent existence of mind. The mentioned quote suggests that someone has been forgotten his past distress and anxieties. This kind of realisation always may not imply the independence existence of mind. It may be that someone knows it well that he has forgotten his/her past but she/he is completely unaware that the mind is an independent being which possess the acquired experiences.

Moreover, in case of logic if it assumes that Homer is a dualist, it will be injustice to his predecessors. Perhaps Homer is not the inventor of the term *nous* as his precursors also used the term mind before him in their conversation. The difference is that Homer materialises his thought in written form but they do not do so. As per the Popper’s remark it may assume the mind-body dualism has been begot since the human beings have been started to use the language conveniently. However, everybody may not agree with this view. The verbal use of any word in ordinary life may not provide any kind of sophisticated philosophical doctrine. The people may not use the terms in philosophical sense.

Aristotle also denies considering Anaxagoras as the founder of mind-body dualism. He believes Hermetimus is the founder of that concept. However, the assertion of Aristotle is not indubitable due

to the lack of evidences concerning the dualism of Hermetimus. It is a matter of question that really Hermetimus offers it or Aristotle arbitrarily assumes it.

From the discussion of the nature and function of mind is clear that the mind can be considered as the mechanic of the whole universe and its existing things. For it is not that the mind has just the knowledge of everything and rules the universe. It plays very important role to form the existing things of the world. It brings the seeds together to produce the things. More precisely can be said the mind works as an efficient cause to make existing things of the world from the seed.

### **5.2 Nature of Matter**

The seed is the material cause of the existing things of the physical world either it is animate or inanimate. To discuss the nature of it says everything is the product of seed.

Since these things are so, it is right to think that there are many different things present in everything that is combined, and seeds of all things having all sorts of forms, colours, and flavours, and that humans and also the other animals were compounded, as many as have soul. (Marmodoro, 2017)

If he assumes all things as the component of seed, there is no problem to explain how the physical as well as living beings have originated from the same seed. There are innumerable seed and these are opposite in nature of mind. For seeds are ruled but mind is ruler, the seeds are material cause but the mind is efficient cause etc.

### **5.3 Mind-Body Relation**

It is clear from the above explanation that the mind and body are naturally and functionally oppose to each other. Anaxagoras also thinks so. Now it is the matter of inquiry is there any relation between these two (mind and body) distinct being? Anaxagoras himself shows a relation between them but not define that relation. Based on it cannot be jump to the conclusion that there is no relation between mind and body. It is an important characteristic of the pre-Socratic era that the pre-Socratic thinkers discuss about the nature of the individual being but do not focus on the relation of the individual beings. Perhaps it was unknown to Anaxagoras that the relation of mind and matter can be defined in particular term otherwise, of course he clarifies it. Even if he does not explain the relation of mind and matter but if we carefully study the function of mind over the material world, will get find one kind of relationship between them.

He says the mind rules everyone who possesses the soul. Mind is an intelligent being and always drives our body as a chariot but not vice versa. So, mind orders our body and the body merely follows the command of mind as slave without any interruption. From this it may assume the mind uses the body as machine. It is not that the mind just controls the body but the whole material world. Anaxagoras does not face as difficulty as Descartes. For Anaxagoras does not recognise the mind as an unextended entity like Descartes. He has been suggested the mind is finest one.

In this case somebody may argue it is prevalent that Anaxagoras believes in the immaterial nature of mind. He also admits the mind is finest. It means the mind is extended. However, these two characteristics cannot be the character of mind together. For which is immaterial cannot be extended and the vice versa. However, it is not a strong objection against Anaxagoras as he does not declare extension is the essence of matter and consciousness is the essence of mind like Descartes. So, if it is said the mind is immaterial and occupies space, it would not lead to any problem for Anaxagoras.

The relation of the mind-body cannot be defined in terms of interactionism or parallelism. For interactionism both the mind and the body interact to each other. However, Anaxagoras suggests one-way relation between mind and body. It means the mind just act upon the body but not vice versa. So, there is no causal relation between mind and matter. According to the doctrine of parallelism mental and physical events happen simultaneously but they have no causal relation. Anaxagoras neither suggests like the parallelism of Spinoza nor like the interactionism of Descartes. From the mentioned discussion one thing is clear that mind is the ruler and the matter is ruled. So, without any hesitation may claim there is a ruler-ruled relation between mind and body.

It seems that the body occasionally influences the mind. It is said all the individual minds are homogeneous. Although the noticeable thing is the grade of intelligence of living beings are not alike.

It varies from species to species as well as person to person. To explain it Burnet said the structure of the body is responsible for that. "The nous in living creatures is the same in all (fr.12), and from this it followed that the different grades of intelligence we observe in the animal and vegetable worlds depends entirely on the structure of the body" (Burnet, 1930).

However, the suggestion of Burnet is one kind of inferential assumption. Burnet has tried to suggest a possible explanation of the variation of intelligence among the living beings as Anaxagoras does not clarify it. It may not be certain as if accept him, says there is no difference of intelligence among the individual human beings. However, the science proves the difference of intelligence from person to person, even if their form of the body is similar to each other. This is why it would be invalid to claim that the form of the body is the barrier of using the power of mind. So, it would be rational, if it does not assume that the mind and body influence to each other.

Now it is matter of consideration that the ruler-ruled relation is teleological or mechanical. Perhaps the relation is not teleological but mechanical. The mind neither creates anything nor controls the phenomenal world intentionally like a carpenter or driver. It performs its function without any attachment like a machine. The machine does not function to achieve the goal of its own. We notice the same for mind. However, it cannot be said for Anaxagoras that someone is controlling the mind as machine. This kind of assertion would lead to the fallacy of infinite regress. If it admits there is something which controls the mind and the same is true for the controller of the mind and it is an endless process, the fallacy will emerge. So, it would be perfect, if says the ruler-ruled relation is mechanical.

## 6. Conclusion

Even if Popper has been suggested the presence of the concept of mind-body dualism in the writings of Homer as well as other Greeks but it is dubious. It is true that Homer uses the term mind in his writing but not in philosophical sense. He actually uses the term mind in his writings in literal sense. So, it may say that the term mind is unable to imply the independent existence of mind in this case. Even some predecessors of Anaxagoras such as Anaximander do not remark anything regarding the mind. So, it may say they neither consider the mind as an independent being nor able to make a sharp distinction between the mind and matter.

On the contrary Anaxagoras admits the independent existence of mind and clearly makes the functional and natural difference between mind and body. It is clear that Anaxagoras is completely opposite of Homer and other pre-Socratics concerning the concept of mind and the mind-body distinction. So it cannot be assumed that Homer as well as the pre-Socratics draws a sharp distinction between mind and body before Anaxagoras. Moreover, the assertion of Aristotle is also not acceptable as he unable to provide the sufficient evidences in favour of his assertion. So, it may consider that Anaxagoras first draws sharp distinction between mind and matter.

From the function of mind may assume that there is a ruler-ruled relation between mind and body. The mind controls both the human body and all the existing things of the world. For the mind plays an important role to produce the human body as well as the existing things and without the activeness of mind the process of creation becomes cease. This relation is one sided as the matter cannot influence the mind anyhow. Hence it can be said that this relation is mechanical in nature but not teleological.

The explanation and understanding of the views of Anaxagoras concerning mind and body clearly suggest that Anaxagoras perhaps believes in the immaterial nature of mind. However, the characteristics and the functions of mind perturb us for he actually talks about the mind or something else. Alfred William Benn perfectly expresses it.

If instead of using Nous as a half-contemptuous nickname for the Clazomenian stranger, his contemporaries had taken the trouble to understand what Nous really meant, they might have found in it the possibility of a deep religious significance; they might have identified it with all that was best and purest in their own guardian goddess Athene; have recognised it as the very foundation of their own most characteristic excellences. (Benn, 1882)

So, it is suspicious that he discusses about the mind or God.

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