

DONALD DAVIDSON ON FIRST-PERSON AUTHORITY

AND

PRIVILEGED ACCESS

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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2012



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CERTIFICATE

It is certified that the dissertation entitled '**Donald Davidson on First-Person Authority and Privileged Access**' submitted by **Richa Kapoor** is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this University. This is original and has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree or diploma of any other University. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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DECLARATION

I, **Richa Kapoor**, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled, **DONALD DAVIDSON ON FIRST-PERSON AUTHORITY AND PRIVILEGED ACCESS**, submitted by me for the partial fulfillment of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is my original work and has not been submitted by me or by anyone else for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university.

RICHA KAPOOR

***WITH LOVE AND GRATITUDE
DEDICATED TO MY DAUGHTER***

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my deep sense of gratitude to my teacher and supervisor **Dr. Manidipa Sen**, Centre for Philosophy, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for her proficient guidance, consistent encouragement and admirable assistance at every stage of my research work. Dr. Sen has been my inspiration from graduation and I am pleased to her for allowing me to work under her expert supervision. Her management skills and perfectionist approach helped me to finish my research work on time. She has been very understanding, dedicated and without her, this dissertation would not have been so interesting. From the core of my heart, I would like to express my special thanks to Dr. Sen whose overwhelming support, encouragement and faith in me has been a driving force in shaping me.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to all the faculty members of the Department of Philosophy for guiding me through the challenging coursework and teaching me the skills of good writing and analyzing. A special thanks to **Prof. R.P Singh, Prof. Gautam** and **Dr. Bhagat Oinam**. A special recognition to the authors mentioned in the bibliography page for their magnificent thoughts and endless contribution to the world of philosophy. Without them my research would not have been possible.

I am also indebted to the University Grant Commission for providing me the financial support through Rajiv Gandhi National Memorial Fellowship. Thanks to Rajendra ji and Dharmendra ji, the staff of the department for assisting me with the administrative tasks necessary for completing my **MPhil** program.

My sincere thanks to the staff of the library, Jawaharlal Nehru University, for providing me the material required for research and also helping me with the online articles for my research work.

A special thanks to all my colleagues and friends, especially Parul for having faith in me and motivating me at every step of my **MPhil** program. I also express my heartfelt gratitude to my husband Abhijeet for his love, moral support and constant encouragement. I am thankful to my lovely daughter, Toshani, for her selfless love, support and understanding me during these years of my education.

Last but not the least, a special thanks to my parents for lending a hand to me and being there for me whenever I need them. And extraordinary thanks to the one above all of us, the Omnipresent God, for answering my prayers and giving me strength to complete me research work on time.

Dated:

RICHA KAPOOR

Place: New Delhi

INTRODUCTION

“If I tell you that the unexamined life is not worth living,
still less will you believe me”¹

With these words, Socrates defended himself to his accusers. His disciple Plato used these same words to accuse the society which has lost touch with the depths of authentic humanity. Since its inception, the problem of self-knowledge has been fundamental to western philosophy. Same is true of any ancient philosophy. The ‘unexamined life’ that Socrates refers to is a life devoid of self-reflection, and hence of self-knowledge. Therefore, knowing oneself is the main task of philosophy, a form of knowledge that is supposed to be emancipatory in its very nature. This enterprise still remains at the centre of philosophy today. In the late twentieth century, however, the problem has taken a new turn, as the question of how we know ourselves has been closely linked with scientific study of human mind and consciousness. In this dissertation my main aim is to look at Donald Davidson’s account of self-knowledge. Davidson is one of the most important contemporary philosophers who has, through a series of articles, tried to reformulate the idea of first-person authority and privileged access of self-knowledge. He has, in doing so, distances himself from both the traditional account of self-knowledge as well as some of the contemporary accounts. Hence, a close study of his views on self-knowledge will be undertaken in this dissertation. In order to do so, we will place his position in the larger debate concerning the nature of self-knowledge. Therefore, we can start our discussion by articulating the different ways in which the term ‘self-knowledge’ has been understood.

Traditionally, the term self-knowledge can be understood as having two different meanings—

- (1) Knowledge of the self
- (2) Knowledge of one’s own mental states

The maxim ‘know thyself’ is generally interpreted understanding concerning the true nature of the self, while the second form of knowledge is concerned with our own particular mental states and processes. From a common sense point of view it is taken for granted that we know many

¹ Plato, 1909-14: 38a.

facts about ourselves, for example- ‘I know that I am an Indian’, ‘I know that I like rainy season’, ‘I know that I like orange color’. However Socrates was not concerned with this second type of knowledge. For Socrates, in order to obtain the right sort of knowledge about one-self one must “look at the soul; and especially at that part of the soul in which...virtue resides.”²

Contemporary philosophers understand the phrase ‘know thyself’ in a different sense. For them self-knowledge is simply the knowledge of one’s own particular mental states. Thus according to them self-knowledge can be understood as knowledge of one’s particular mental states, including one’s beliefs, desires and sensations. Self-knowledge is about understanding one’s desires, hopes, beliefs and fears and an enquiry into the modes through which we come to know them. Intuitively, we believe that self-knowledge has some sort of epistemic privilege over the knowledge of the external world and of the other minds. We know what we are thinking in a direct, non-inferential way; others can know what we are thinking too, but this knowledge can be said to be indirect and inferential. In the field of epistemology and philosophy of mind, it is said that the subject has the privileged access to his own thoughts and beliefs. This access to the content of our own mind exists in such a way that others do not have such access. The problem that has bothered philosophers is how to understand the idea of ‘privileged access’ to one’s own mind and the related idea of first-person authority that accompanies it.

One of the most important questions concerning the knowledge of one’s own mind—

- (1) Is it possible to have self-knowledge?
- (2) If it is so, how do we acquire it?³

It is evident that both these questions are interrelated and unless we give a satisfactory answer to the first question about the possibility of self-knowledge, we are unable to answer our second question, that is, how we acquire self-knowledge? My prime concern of this thesis is to answer the second question—how do we acquire self-knowledge?

² Ibid., 24d-27e.

³ Cassam, 1994: 7.

Broadly speaking, two different answers can be given to the question of ‘how do we acquire self-knowledge’? One is associated mainly with Descartes and the other with anti-Cartesians like Gilbert Ryle. Let us first understand Descartes’ philosophy in general and his position on self-knowledge.

The problem of self-knowledge took a new turn with Descartes’ work, particularly his dualism of the mind and the body. Descartes was unwilling to recognize himself as knowing anything unless his beliefs can stand up to scrutiny. He scrutinizes his own beliefs, in his famous work *Meditations* by formulating the grounds for doubting his beliefs. Descartes began his philosophy by following a method of doubting almost all the possible claims to knowledge and things that we usually claim to know that can be doubted. He doubted the presence of his body, doubted whether he is at the moment awake rather than dreaming and thereby doubted all his beliefs based on sensory experience. Interestingly, as Descartes finds reason to doubt more and more, it is ultimately his own mind that he judges to be immune to doubt.

For Descartes, the fact that one exists as a thinking being is indubitable. He claims that a person has privileged access to the contents of one’s own mind even in the doubt scenario. Descartes seems to hold a view that the knowledge of our own mind is infallible and is perfectly transparent. From Descartes’ work we can derive some salient features of self-knowledge. Broadly speaking, there are three features of self-knowledge namely--

(1) Immediacy:

The most common claim made by Descartes’ introspective notion of self-knowledge is that it is immediate or direct. It is a claim according to which self-ascriptions are not made through inference.

(2) Authority:

If a person makes a claim about his own mental states then that is a guarantee of the truth of what they say. It follows that the subject who is making such a claim is authoritative and the subject’s making such a claim about his own psychological ascriptions is a criterion for the correctness of the claim. To put it differently, it means that a person’s self-ascription is taken to be true by default.

(3) Salience:

If a person makes a claim about his own psychological ascriptions then it is expected that the subject is aware of his own psychological ascriptions.⁴

But the Cartesian notion of mind and self-knowledge as immediate, infallible and transparent has been challenged by both Hume and Kant. Let us see what Hume famously said about the knowledge of his own mind—

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of hot or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.⁵

Hume points out that when I introspect or look inwards I can catch various representations of myself: myself having breakfast this morning, myself as a professor, myself as a three year old child. But I cannot catch the ‘I’ who is doing the representing. Thus Hume concluded that ‘self is an illusion’⁶; that what we call ‘self’ is nothing but a bundle of perceptions.

Hume wrote--

There are some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our self; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity...For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other...I never can catch myself.⁷

Thus, for Hume there is no self at all. Kant echoes a similar kind of doubt about self-knowledge.

“...now in inner intuition, there is nothing permanent, for the ‘I’ is merely the consciousness of my thought. So long as we do not go beyond mere thinking, we are without the necessary condition for applying the concept of substance, that is, of a self-subsistent subject, to the self as a thinking being. And with the

⁴ Wright, Smith & MacDonald, 1998: 1-2.

⁵ Hume, 1739, 1.4: Sec.6.1.

⁶ Ibid., Sec.6.4.

⁷ Ibid., Sec.6.2-6.3.

objective reality of the concept of substance, the allied concept of simplicity likewise vanishes...”⁸

Unlike Hume and Kant, Descartes endorsed a qualified, infallibility thesis of self-knowledge. Descartes says--

There remain sensations, emotions and appetites. These may be clearly perceived provided we take great care in our judgments concerning them to include no more than what is strictly contained in our perception—no more than that of which we have inner awareness. But this is a very difficult rule to observe, at least with regard to sensations.⁹

It is true that we all are unhesitatingly aware of our desires, beliefs and intentions; such knowledge about our mental states is known as self-knowledge. One of the most important and undeniable fact is that Descartes has clearly become the central figure on the subject of self-knowledge in analytic tradition. Descartes’ indubitability and infallibility thesis with regard to self-knowledge plays a crucial role in understanding and articulating the notion of self-knowledge even today. Ultimately, this insight regarding the indubitability of the mental, led Descartes to advance a view about the metaphysics of mind that was widely influential, that is, Descartes’ mind-body dualism. According to this view, mind and body are two distinct entities. The Cartesian view of the mind is that the subject is not only aware of the contents of his mind, there is a special method of knowing the mental contents of one’s own mind. This method is known as introspection. Descartes claims that the subject comes to know about the mental contents through the model of inner observation. For him we come to know our psychological self-ascriptions through inner observation. He claims that unlike the knowledge of the external world, knowledge of our own mind is based on a form of observation that is infallible.

Unlike the epistemic status of self-knowledge there is a non-epistemic way of understanding self-knowledge. According to the non-epistemic view, self-knowledge does not consist in observation of one’s thoughts. Davidson’s notion of first-person authority, Wittgenstein’s expressivists account and Richard Moran’s agential account are some of the examples of the

⁸ Kant, 1781: B413.

⁹ Descartes, 1644/1985: 216.

non-epistemic view of the self-knowledge. I will discuss Davidson's and Wittgenstein's account in the following chapters.

On the basis of these characteristics of self-knowledge, Descartes holds a belief that we know our thoughts infallibly through introspection alone. According to him no one could possibly be in a better epistemic position with respect to one's thoughts than the thinking individual himself.

This introspective account of self-knowledge was quite unacceptable by many philosophers.

As we just mentioned, self-knowledge is the knowledge of a person's beliefs, intentions, sensations etc. One can ask here, in order to understand this special feature of self-knowledge—is it possible for a person to falsely believe that he is in pain when actually he is not in pain? This question, and similar questions concerning one's beliefs, desires, intentions etc, has been answered differently by different philosophers. For Descartes it is not possible to falsely believe about our mental states. According to Descartes, to believe that 'I am in pain' is to be actually in pain and thus we have an immediate and direct access to our mental states. He argues that a person can never have false beliefs about his own mental lives. Thus according to Descartes we have privileged access to our mental contents which others lack. There is, therefore, an asymmetry between self-knowledge and knowledge of the mental states of others. The problem that arises in the context of Davidson's account of self-knowledge is twofold—

- (1) How do we account for this introspective method?
- (2) How do we account for a relationship between knowing our own minds and knowing the minds of other?
- (3) How can we understand first-person authority without adhering to an introspective account of self-knowledge?

One solution to the Cartesian notion of self is found in the philosophy of Gilbert Ryle as he criticized Descartes' notion of introspective self-knowledge and puts forth his dispositional account of self-knowledge. Unlike Descartes observational account of self-knowledge, Ryle famously argued that self-knowledge is an inferential matter and there is nothing special about it. According to Ryle, self-knowledge is in principle as fallible as any other kind of knowledge. For Ryle we come to know about our own mental states in the same way as we come to know about

the mental states of others by observing their behavior. Ryle claims that self-observation is not a matter of immediate access to our intentional states. We ascribe intentional states to ourselves on the basis of what we say and do, thus for Ryle the immediacy of self-knowledge is an illusion.

Thus based on the above discussion one can say that Cartesian view on self-knowledge underscores the dispositional features of intentional states. And unlike Cartesians, Ryle paradigm stresses the dispositional feature of self-knowledge. In the contemporary literature on self-knowledge, both the introspective paradigm of Descartes and inferential paradigm of Ryle have come under attack.

While keeping the views of Descartes and Ryle in the broader framework, one can clearly say that both of them presents opposite views with regard to the knowledge of one's own mind. Thus with the aim to fill the gap between these two extreme positions of Descartes and Ryle, I will present the philosophical view of Donald Davidson on self-knowledge. Unlike both the extreme positions of Descartes and Ryle about self-ascriptions, Davidson puts forth a view of self-knowledge which respects first-person authority without adhering to an introspective account of self-knowledge. Davidson claims that the subject is authoritative about the contents of his/her own mind and this authoritative view is based on an assumption. Davidson claims that it is commonly recognized that there is a presumption of first-person authority that it is generally reasonable to assume that the subject knows what he/she knows, thinks desires etc.

Thus according to Davidson neither the introspective view of Descartes nor the inferential view of Ryle seems to fit under the paradigm of self-knowledge. And by presenting the triangulation view he tried to solve the problem of self-knowledge. According to the triangulation view of self, knowledge of our own mind, knowledge of the mind of others and the knowledge of the external world should be taken together.

First chapter of my thesis is mainly concerned with the traditional debate about self-knowledge in the philosophy of mind. In the contemporary philosophy the debate on self-knowledge can be said to begin from the writings of Descartes. In the beginning of my first chapter I am primarily concerned with the philosophical view of Descartes on self-knowledge. Descartes famously claimed that the mind and body are two distinct entities. This substance dualism is a consequence of his Method of Doubt.

Thus Descartes claimed that mind is transparent to itself unlike the external world. According to him the subject can never be wrong about the contents of his mental states as they are directly given to the subject. Based on this, Descartes claimed that we have privileged access to the contents of our mind. This privileged access can be understood as the special way of knowing the contents of our own mind, it can be said to be special in the sense that it is unavailable to others. Thus Cartesian view on self-knowledge is based on the observational model of knowing our own minds. And the special method of knowing our own mind is known as introspection which means 'looking inward'. I will also consider the objections raised against Descartes' introspective account of self-knowledge by Hume, Kant and Ryle and the alternative views that is proposed by them regarding self-knowledge.

In the second chapter, my main aim is to explain Donald Davidson's account of first-person authority and privileged access. As already discussed, Cartesian understanding of privileged access has been criticized by Ryle. Davidson also accepts the notion of privileged access but not in Cartesian sense. For Davidson, privileged access can be best understood in the authoritative sense. According to Davidson, the subject is authoritative about his/ her own psychological ascriptions and this authority is known as first-person authority. For Davidson this authority is not based on evidence as it is based on presumption. The presumption is based on the fact that the subject can never be wrong about his/ her mental contents. Thus Davidson's notion of privileged access lies in presumptive acceptability of first-person authority.

The anti-Cartesian picture of psychological states is further motivated by the views that since mind and world are not two independent categories; the world enters constitutively into the individuation of mental states. Hence, to have a full understanding of such states, it would not be sufficient to know what goes on inside the head. This account of the mind results into the debate between the externalists and the internalists' interpretation of the mental.

Moving further I will discuss Davidson's externalist position along with the externalist position of Putnam and Burge. Davidson tried to hold his externalist position along with the consistency of privileged access and first-person authority. Putnam's externalist position can be understood as physical externalism. Putnam was the first philosopher to show the threat externalism poses

for self-knowledge. For Putnam meaning of a word depends solely upon the external world and thus we cannot have direct access to the contents of our own minds. After discussing Putnam's physical externalism I will discuss the externalist position of Burge. Unlike Putnam, Burge's externalism is known as social externalism, for Burge in order to know what someone is thinking one has to depend upon the social environment.

However, Davidson was neither convinced by Putnam's externalist position and nor with Burge's position. Davidson claimed that meanings can be in the head even though what I mean may depend on things in the outside world. He puts forth the triangular view of knowledge according to this knowledge of our own mind, knowledge of the minds of others and knowledge of the external world, all should be taken together. Further Davidson claims that in order to have successful communication both the speaker and the hearer should share something in order to understand each other. He suggests that understanding only require sharing the world in which interpretation takes place. Davidson's investigation of the possibility of human communication can be understood in the following way—

The interpreter's assumption of a degree of rationality on the part of those she wishes to understand is [...] no more than a condition of understanding them at all.¹⁰

Further Davidson claims that to assume a minimal amount of rationality on the part of the speaker is a necessary condition for being able to interpret and also a necessary condition for having any propositional attitude at all.¹¹ Thus one can say that according to Davidson's account having a propositional attitude is a necessary condition for being rational. A speaker having self-knowledge is constitutive of his being interpretable; hence having self-knowledge is a necessary condition for being rational.

In the third chapter, my prime focus is to show the denial of the representational view of the meaning and mind by Davidson. Unlike the internalist, Davidson holds the externalist position with respect to the content of the mind. He further claims that we should not think of the world as something being present 'out there' rather should think that we all are the part of this world. Davidson rejected the conceptual relativism and states that it results into interpretation of the

¹⁰ Davidson, 2001g: 89.

¹¹ Davidson, 2001e: 368.

world differently by different people. Further he claims that relativism presuppose a dualism of 'scheme' and 'content' and his central argument against conceptual relativism is the rejection of the scheme and content distinction. In order to strengthen Davidson's position, one can understand the philosophy of Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein in his famous work *Philosophical Investigations* rejected the notion of private language on the ground that private language restricts the possibility of communication. For communication to be possible it is very essential to have a common language that is understood by the speaker as well as by the hearer. Wittgenstein claims that to say 'I am in pain' is not used to report a person rather it is a way of expressing oneself to others. As opposed to the observational model of Descartes and the non-observational model of Ryle, Wittgenstein puts forth the expressivist account of knowing one's own mind. Though Davidson does not accept an expressivist account of self-knowledge, there is no doubt that he was greatly influenced by the Wittgenstein's criticism of the idea of private language, along with the denial that our mental life is purely inner. So Wittgenstein also thinks that the idea of 'subjective' is a myth along with Davidson. Hence it is important to look at Wittgenstein's argument against private language in order to fully appreciate Davidson's position.

CHAPTER 1

Self-Knowledge

Introduction

It is natural to distinguish what we call physical from what we call mental. From a common sense point of view we think that body is something that perishes or come to an end whereas mind is something which never dies. Moreover it is also believed that as both mind and the body have distinct characteristics so they are different. The material or the physical features of a being refers to his/her complexion, size, shape, weight etc. The mental features refer to emotions, beliefs, desires, thoughts and sensations. The question that philosophers pose is- though we make this distinction in our day-to-day life, is there any basis for making this distinction? Or, more importantly, though mind and body may have distinct characteristics, are they, for that reason, really independent of each other? However different philosophers answer this question in different ways. For idealist like Berkeley, idea or mind is the only reality whereas for dualists like Descartes this distinction between mind and body is necessary and therefore they uphold a form of dualism.

Now before going into the detail account of Cartesian understanding of self-knowledge, it is important to understand the notion of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge can be understood as the knowledge of our own mental states, beliefs, desires etc. Intuitively, we believe that self-knowledge has some sort of epistemic status: we know what we are thinking in a direct, non-inferential way; others can know what we are thinking too, but this knowledge can be said to be indirect and inferential. In the field of epistemology and philosophy of mind, it is said that the first- person or the subject has the privileged access to his own thoughts and beliefs. This access to the content of our own mind exists in such a way that others do not have such access.

For Descartes, we still have privileged access even in the doubt scenario. Thus based on this ground one can say that there are mainly three characteristics of Descartes notion of self-knowledge—

(1) Infallibility:

In the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes worries that he may be deceived by an evil demon. As a result, all of his beliefs about the external world may be false. Thus Descartes claims that we can be deceived about the knowledge of the external world but one thing we can be certain about is about the existence of the content of his own mind. The scope of infallibility has been exaggerated by Descartes. According to this view, a person has privileged access to his mental contents and this knowledge of the mental content cannot be doubted. To put it in other words, Descartes claims that we have introspective account of self-knowledge and this knowledge of our mental states is not based on inference as it is directly given to us, thus is non-erroneous or infallible. In this way, he claims that we have a privileged position to make judgments about our mental states, and these judgments can never be false. Thus he believes that if a person is in a particular mental state then he knows that he is in that mental state and his knowledge about his own mental state can never be false as it is infallible.

(2) Self-intimation:

Another account of our privileged access stems from the doctrine of self-intimation. Self-intimation means to have a mental state is to know that one has it. A mental state is self-intimating if it is impossible for a person to be in that mental state and not know that he is in a particular mental state. To put it differently, it means that if a person is in particular mental state then he is aware of his mental state. This doctrine is also sometimes refers to 'Transparency Thesis.' It claims that whatever happens in the mind is known to the subject or is completely transparent to that person. For Descartes, human mind is transparent to itself and thus we do not need any other proof to show that the contents of our mind can be known introspectively.

(3) Immediacy:

An additional claim that is often made about Descartes introspective notion of self-knowledge is that it is immediate or direct. To claim that introspective access is immediate is to claim that our introspective beliefs are non-inferential and non-evidential. Immediacy is often linked with infallibility claim as it is believed that

Descartes' introspective account of self-knowledge as being directly given to us and is inferred from any other beliefs, are said to be free from error.

On the basis of these characteristics of self-knowledge, Descartes holds that we know our thoughts infallibly through introspection alone. According to him no one could possibly be in a better epistemic position with respect to one's thoughts than the thinking individual himself. Let us now understand Descartes philosophical position with respect to self-knowledge in detail.

1.1 Descartes' Mind-Body Dualism

In general, dualism can be understood as an idea that there are two categories or kinds of things: mental and physical. In contrast to dualists there are monists, who hold that there is only one reality and the nature of this reality differs, depending on whether someone is a materialist or an idealist. Historically, dualism came into existence with the philosophy of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, but Descartes remains one of the most prominent proponents of dualism. Descartes' mind-body dualism is one of the most debated topics in the history of the philosophy. The dualist position of Descartes marked a turning point in the history of the philosophy of mind. His dualism is derived from his general epistemic position, which in turn, is a consequence of his skeptical method. So, in order to understand Descartes' grounds for admitting dualism, we need to understand the special methodology he adopted for his philosophy.

Skeptical Method

Descartes being the father of modern philosophy attempted to break from the philosophical tradition followed by ancient philosophers especially Aristotle and puts forth his own philosophy. As a mathematician, Descartes desired to acquire knowledge that is certain and error free. In the *Discourse on Method* Descartes says—

Of all who have sought for the truth in the sciences, it has been the mathematicians alone who have been able to succeed in producing reasons which are evident and certain.¹²

¹²Descartes, 1985:12.

He began his philosophy by introducing an important and distinct method of philosophizing which he thought, would help him achieve his goal of acquiring knowledge that is indubitable and certain. This method is known as Methodic Doubt. It is based on the strategy of doubting each and every knowledge claim that we usually consider to be true. He thinks that a proposition is false when it includes even the slightest of doubt in it. Descartes main target therefore, was to know something that is certain, indubitable and incorrigible. Thus, Descartes begins the *Meditations* by asking the simple question: what are the knowledge claims that can be questioned or put to doubt? The main aim of asking such a question is to reach at certainty. In answer to this question he first doubts the information that he receives through the senses. In the next stage he doubts the knowledge of the other minds i.e. whether others exist or not by doubting the existence of the world. And in the third argument he doubted the mathematical proposition by putting forward the possibility that he may be deceived by an evil demon in believing the certainty and indubitability of mathematical propositions.

Let us now try to understand all different stages of this Methodic Doubt as follows--

(1) The Argument from Illusion

According to this argument Descartes claims that the senses, like the sense of sight, smell, etc. cannot be trusted because they very often deceive us. Descartes believed that the senses distort the way things actually are. This argument is the beginning of his attempt to subject all his beliefs and experiences to doubt. In order to show that our ordinary knowledge claims can be doubted Descartes started with our claims based on sense experience of various kinds. Descartes claims that the knowledge based on our senses cannot be true as our senses deceive us and thus lack certainty. For Descartes, certainty is best supplied by reason. He holds the view that reliance on our senses is very obscure and confusing as it does not result indubitable knowledge; there can be a situation where a tall thing may appear to be short when viewed from a distance or a stick placed in water can appear bent. It may also happen that we may make mistakes in identifying a particular color, like a red tie may look orange. Thus one can say that the knowledge obtained through sense experience cannot be free from doubt, hence cannot be regarded as proper case of knowledge.

(2) The Dreaming Argument

Moving forward to the second argument, Descartes doubted the existence of other minds. In the first argument he doubted the knowledge gained through sense perception. Having concluded that his senses mislead him completely, he considers that it may be possible that he is currently dreaming. Descartes raised a more systematic method for doubting the legitimacy of all sensory perception through his dreaming argument. The basic idea Descartes held is that the experience we have at the time of dreaming are similar to those we have at waking stage. Descartes writes in his First *Meditation* “there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from the sleep.”¹³

The dream experience would seem realistic even when reflecting on the experience, while having it. As Descartes writes: “every sensory experience I have ever thought I will be having while awake I can also think of myself as sometimes having while asleep.”¹⁴

Thus, as it is impossible for us to distinguish our dream experience from waking experience (both being equally clear and vivid), we can think of the world including other minds being part of our dream. Thus, Descartes puts forth his view that since our senses deceive us, we cannot know whether others exist or not as there can be a case that he may be dreaming about the other minds as well as about the world.

(3) The Evil Demon Argument

The final argument of the First *Meditations* concerns the most powerful reason for doubting our beliefs about the world. We may be deceived by some supernatural, all powerful Being. In this argument he doubted the mathematical propositions by putting forth his view that there may be a situation where the evil demon may be deceiving me. Descartes thinks that there might be a demon so potent and malignant that he tricks us to believe in falsehood.¹⁵ The demon argument assumes that “some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has all his energies in order to

¹³ Ibid., p.13.

¹⁴ Ibid., Vol. I, p.53.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.13.

deceive me.”¹⁶ Then I have reason to doubt the totality of all my senses as well as the mathematical knowledge that I have. The evil demon presents a complete illusion of an external world, including other people.

Thus in the First *Meditation*, Descartes begins with skeptical argument and doubts everything in the Second *Meditation*. After raising the skeptical doubts about almost everything in the First *Meditation*, he concluded that he was certain about his own existence, since in order to doubt one has to exist. So in the Second *Meditation* he writes—

I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, and no bodies. Does it now follow that I too do not exist? No: if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed. But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long or I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly I must finally conclude that this proposition, I am, I exist, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.¹⁷

Since anything that can be doubted was discarded as untrue knowledge, Descartes tried to look for something that is indubitable or free from doubt to serve as the ground of his system of thinking. For him, the only thing that cannot be doubted was doubting itself. To still doubt that you are doubting is self-contradictory and impossible because the data subjected to doubt has already been proven true at the very moment the act has been carried out. Moving on from this, Descartes argues that doubting is a mode of thinking and thus no one can deny that he is thinking because rejecting the idea proves that he is already thinking. For Descartes thinking is something that can never be nothing. Since thinking is something, and since I am certain that I am thinking, then I am certain that I am something. To put it in Descartes words: *I think, therefore I am.*¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid., p.15.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.16.

¹⁸ Ibid., vol. I, p. 225.

Thus in the Second *Meditation*, after raising doubts about almost everything, Descartes establishes with absolute certainty – “I think, therefore I am,” “*Cogito ergo Sum.*” Moving forward in the Second *Meditation*, Descartes holds that we can be doubtful about all beliefs but one thing which cannot be doubted is ‘I’ who is doubting. Even if I am being deceived by an evil demon, I must exist in order to be deceived at all. So “I must finally conclude that the proposition, ‘I am’, ‘I exist’, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.”¹⁹ It means that we cannot doubt one thing that is my own existence. It does not matter whether my belief is true or false, the point which Descartes wants to emphasize is that I am certain about my own existence as a thinking being. Hence in the very act of doubting or thinking the subject is present as a thinking substance. For him, “I exist” is an indubitable and absolute certain belief that serves as an axiom from which other, absolute certain truths can be deduced.

Descartes writes in the *Principles of Philosophy* that “It is not possible for us to doubt we exist while we are doubting; and this is the first thing we come to know when we philosophize in an orderly way.”²⁰ Thus most indubitable truth is ‘I think;’ while Descartes goes on to doubt the existence of one’s body. Not only Descartes is certain that he exists as a thinking being, he is also certain that it is he who doubts everything.

It is not the one and the same I would doubt almost everything who nevertheless understands something, who affirms that this one thing is true, who denies everything else, who desires to know more, who is unwilling to be deceived, who imagines many things even involuntarily, and is aware of many things which apparently come from the senses? Are not all these things true as the fact that I exist? It is the same ‘I’ who has sensory perception, or is aware of bodily things as it were through the senses. For example, I am now seeing the light, hearing a noise, feeling. But I am asleep so all these are false. Yet I certainly seem to see, to hear and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is

¹⁹ Ibid., Vol. II, p.17.

²⁰ Ibid., Vol. I, p.194.

called having a sensory perception is strictly just this, and in this restricted sense of the term it simply thinking.²¹

Thus, the indubitable truth at which Descartes reached is that I am a thinking being. Thinking is something and can never be nothing. To put it in simple words—"I think therefore I exist." Thinking requires the existence of the thinking being. Moreover Descartes is certain that he exists because he thinks. This does not mean that he is certain that his 'body' exists because the knowledge of the body is acquired through the senses and the knowledge from the senses is unreliable for Descartes. So he is uncertain that he exists as a body, but he was certain that he exists as a 'thinking being.'

Mind- Body Relation

The mind according to Descartes was a 'thinking thing' an immaterial substance. This 'thing' was the essence of himself that which doubts, believes, hopes and thinks. This distinction between the mind and the body is argued in *Meditation VI* as follows--

I have a clear and distinct idea of myself as a thinking, non-extended and non-thinking thing. Whatever I can conceive clearly and distinctly, God can so create. So, Descartes argues, the mind, a thinking thing, can exist apart from its extended body. And therefore, the mind is a substance distinct from the body, a substance whose essence is thought.²²

After laying the foundation for knowledge in terms of the *Cogito*, Descartes proceeds further by putting forward his dualist account of metaphysics by providing arguments for his mind-body dualism. Now before moving forward to understand the relation between mind and the body, it is significant to understand the meaning of mind and body and to understand to what extent they are separate or identical. Different philosophers tried to answer this question in their own way, one such philosopher is Descartes, who tries to tackle the problem of mind and body by keeping them aside as two distinct entities. In the *Discourse*, Descartes presented the following argument to establish that mind and body are distinct substances—

²¹Descartes, 1985:19.

²²Descartes, 1984:1-62.

Next I examined attentively that I was. I saw that while I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world and no place for me to be in, I could not for all that pretend that I did not exist. I saw on the contrary that from the mere fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed; whereas if I had merely ceased thinking, even if everything else I had ever imagined had been true, I should have had no reason to believe that I existed. From this I knew I was a substance whose essence or nature is simply to think, and which does not require any place or depend on any material thing, in order to exist. According to this ‘I’—that is, the soul by which I am what I am—is entirely distinct from the body, and would not fail to be whatever it is, even if the body did not exist.²³

Descartes thus radically separates the mental and the physical, by claiming that they are indeed two different kinds of substances. In his *Meditations* he writes—

There is a great difference between the mind and the body, in as much as the body is by its very nature always divisible, while the mind is utterly indivisible. For when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any parts within myself...By contrast, there is no corporeal or extended thing that I cannot think of which in my thought I cannot easily divide into parts; and this very fact makes me understand that it is divisible. This one argument would be enough to show me that the mind is completely different from the body, even if I did not already know as much from other considerations.²⁴

For Descartes body is something that is divisible into parts whereas mind is something that cannot be divided into parts. Body for Descartes is spatially located and is extended whereas mind is not spatially located and is unextended. Thus, he concludes that his thoughts belong to a non-spatial substance that is distinct from matter. In the Second *Meditation* we can clearly see Descartes establishing the independent existence of the thinking thing by doubting the existence of body. To put it in Descartes words—

²³ Ibid. ,Vol. I. p.127.

²⁴ Descartes, 1985: 9.

The mind uses its own freedom and supposes the non- existence of all things about whose existence it can have the slightest doubt; in so doing the mind notices that it is impossible that it should not exist during this time. This exercise is also of the greatest benefit, since it enables the mind to distinguish without difficulty what belongs to itself, i.e. to an intellectual nature, from what belongs to the body.²⁵

Descartes, moving forward from the Second *Meditation* introduces a real distinction of mind and body in the Sixth *Meditation*. As a dualist, Descartes believed that mind and body are two separate substances. Descartes does not define nor offer any proof that mind or body is a substance in any of the *Meditation*. But it is in the *Principles of Philosophy* that he defines a substance as something which “exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence.”²⁶ Descartes defines a substance as a thing that does not depend on anything else for its existence, that is to say, a substance is self-subsisting thing. He distinguished mind and matter as two distinct substances on the ground that they are self-subsisting entities having contradictory attributes. The attribute of the mind is thought and it is non-extended, whereas the attribute of the matter is extension.

For Descartes mind and body are not just two substances but they are metaphysically two different kinds of substance. He very clearly states this fact in the Sixth *Meditations* that they are not only different but in some way opposite. The reason Descartes goes on to say this is that the inert extended matter, whatever kind it may be or however it is arranged, cannot think of it as completely unextended. Extension is not a notion or property that could ever be discovered among the properties of mind. As a result neither can be reduced to the other. Thus, in the Sixth *Meditation* Descartes states that—

Since I know that anything that I clearly and distinctly understand can be brought about by God just as I understand it, it is sufficient that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing without another in order for me to be certain that one is different form the other, since they can be placed apart at least by God. And it does not matter by what power that happens, in order for

²⁵ Descartes, 1985:9.

²⁶ Ibid. Vol. I, p.210.

them to be regarded as different. Consequently, from the very fact that I know that I exist, and that at the same time I notice nothing else at all to pertain to my nature or essence, except that I am a thinking thing, I conclude correctly that my essence consists in this one thing, that I am thinking thing. And although perhaps (or rather, as I will soon say, certainly) I have a body, which is very closely joined to me. However, I have on the one hand a clear and distinct idea of myself, insofar as I am only a thinking, not an extended thing, and on the other hand a distinct idea of body insofar as it is only an extended thing, not thinking, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.²⁷

It is obvious from the above passage that Descartes has a clear and distinct idea of the mind as a thinking, non-extended thing whereas idea of the body as an extended, non-thinking thing. Therefore, for Descartes mind is distinct from the body and can exist without it.

By taking a skeptical stance, and establishing the *Cogito* as the first indubitable principle, Descartes reached at the conclusion that mind is distinct from the body and inferred that mind can exist without the body. According to Descartes, his ability to clearly and distinctly understand mind and body separately from one another implies that each can exist alone without the other. Now, one can question the reasons for the distinction between mind and body as two distinct entities? The first and foremost reason is being religious and the second reason for this distinction is Descartes' scientific orientation.

(1) Religious motivation:

Descartes in his *Meditation* defines mind as invisible without dimension, immaterial, unchanging, indivisible and without limit. In defining mind and matter as two distinct entities, Descartes was fulfilling a religious agenda. Mind defined by Descartes as indivisible and without limit can be equated with the soul which can be proved to be distinct from the body and can be said to be immortal. Descartes, as a religious person with having a sincere faith in God, attempts to show that his new scientific method is consistent with Christianity and provide no threat to it.

²⁷ Ibid., Vol. II, p.54

At the beginning of his seminal work, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes states that his purpose in showing that the human mind or soul is really distinct from the body is to refute those ‘irreligious people’ who only have faith in mathematics and will not believe in the soul’s immortality without a mathematical demonstration of it.

Descartes, after proving that he exists as a thinking thing, tries to show the existence of a perfect being as he was aware that humans are imperfect beings. For him the idea of ‘imperfection’ comes from the idea of the ‘perfect’ because we cannot know the one without the other. And the ‘Perfect Being’ for Descartes is none other than ‘God.’ For him the idea that God is perfect, clear and distinct, it is also innate. After proving the existence of God, Descartes pressed on to state that man can rely on his reason because reason is due to God. Since God is perfect he can never deceive us because doing so, destroys his perfect nature.

(2) Scientific motivation:

In order to provide a sound basis for scientific enquiry, Descartes aimed to show that the scientific knowledge lay in the mind and not in the senses. He divided mind and body into two distinct substances, in order to show how science and religion could be compatible. As science will be completely true of body as extended matter; religion on the other hand deals with the immortality of the soul or the mind.

This means that the idea of mind and body represent two natures that have absolutely nothing in common. And, it is this complete diversity that raises questions about the possibility of their independent existence. As a result, minds without bodies and bodies without minds would require nothing besides God’s concurrence to exist and, therefore, they are two really distinct substances.

The Real Distinction

The main conclusion that Descartes derives at is that mind is really distinct from the body. In *Principles of Philosophy*, Part-1, section-60, Descartes explains this real distinction between mind and body. Here he first states that it is a distinction between two substances. Next he goes on to state that this real distinction can be perceived when one substance is clearly understood

without the other. In arguing for the real distinction between mind and body, Descartes is arguing that mind is separate substance from body and can be understood without the body.

In the *Sixth Meditation* Descartes argues that mind and body are really distinct from each other. The first argument to show the distinct nature of mind and body is the understanding of the mind as a thinking, non-extended thing whereas understanding body as something non-thinking, extended thing. As both mind and body have opposed characteristics, so for Descartes they are two separate substances.

Later in the *Sixth Meditation* Descartes claims that we have to understand the nature of body to be divisible into parts, while the nature of the mind is understood to be “something quite simple and complete”²⁸ so as not to be composed of parts and is therefore indivisible. Thus it follows that mind and body cannot have the same nature as both consist of contradictory characteristics.

Thus Descartes’ Real Distinction of mind and body leads to Cartesian Dualism. The Cartesian Dualism suggests that man is a compound of these two diametrically opposed substances. Descartes states in the *Sixth Meditation*—

Nature also teaches me, by these sensation of pain, hunger thirst and so on that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor present in the ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unity.²⁹

As it is clear from the above quote, for Descartes mind and body are two distinct but inseparable substances that are inseparably related to each other.

The Mind-Body Problem

However Descartes distinction of mind and body as two distinct but inseparable substances leads to a famous problem known as the mind-body problem. As Descartes claims that the respective natures of mind and body are completely different and opposed to each other. Mind according to him is immaterial thing without any extension whereas body is a material thing without any property of thinking in it. The difficulty with this idea arises when we notice a fact that our

²⁸ Descartes, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “Descartes overview.”
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/descarte/>

²⁹ Descartes, 1985:56.

mental states cause the physical states and also our physical states cause the mental states. Thus one can say that the mind-body problem arises because Descartes adheres to two points, one and the same time—

- (1) Mind and body are distinct independent entities having contradictory properties.
- (2) Mind and body interacts with each other, so that our mental states cause physical states and physical states cause mental states.

The second problem can be understood more clearly with the help of an example-- the intention to ask a question in class causes the raising of one's arm. One can here question Descartes—how does this interaction between two substances of completely opposed characters take place? How can something simple and unextended bring about change in something extended and divisible?

Descartes never seemed to be very much concerned about this problem. The point that Descartes wants to put forth is that though mind and body are diametrically opposed to each other having completely different properties, they cannot remain separate but must exist in unity. Now, one can question how can these two substances of completely different nature causally interact with each other as well as exist in unity? Descartes answers this question by saying that it is through 'pineal gland' in the brain that the mind interacts with the body. Descartes believed that the pineal gland is the bridge between the mind and the body. The pineal gland is supposed to be a tiny organ in the center of the brain. Descartes regarded it as the principal seat of the soul and the place in which all our thoughts are formed.

In 1640, Descartes wrote several letters to answer a number of questions that his contemporaries had raised regarding the mind-body problem. He explained why he regarded the pineal gland as the principal seat of the soul.

My view is that this gland is the principal seat of the soul, and the place in which all our thoughts are formed. The reason I believe this is that I cannot find any part of the brain, except this, which is not double. Since we see only one thing with two eyes, and hear only one voice with two ears, and in short have never more than one thought at a time, it must necessarily be the case that the impressions which enter by the two eyes or by the two ears, and so on, unite with each other in some part of the body before being considered by the soul. Now it is impossible to find any such place in the whole head except this gland;

moreover it is situated in the most suitable possible place for this purpose, in the middle of all concavities; and it is supported and surrounded by the little branches of the carotid arteries which bring the spirits into the brain.³⁰

Thus one can say that the Cartesian vision of the mind consists of three interlocking components—

- (1) First, Descartes held the view that the mind is something distinct from the body. The body is an ‘extended substance’ whereas mind is something ‘unextended’ i.e. not composed of matter and does not occupy space.
- (2) For Descartes, the mind is a simple substance-- it is unitary, indivisible and without parts.
- (3) Finally, the mind is ‘transparent’ to itself, automatically and is incorrigibly aware of its own contents.

Thus, it is important to understand that for Descartes a mind with above characteristics is indubitably and infallibly aware of itself.

I have discussed the first two features of mind. Now it is the last feature which has to be discussed because knowing about our own mind is something opposed to the knowledge of other things. Now before going into the detailed account of Descartes notion of self and self-knowledge, in the next section I will give a brief introduction of self-knowledge.

1.2 Self-Knowledge and Privileged Access

At this point one can ask the question --how would a person react if someone tells him that you do not know the content of your own thoughts or that you do not know what you mean by your sincere first-person assertions? I believe that most of us will find such claims non-sensical and unacceptable since normally we think that we have an authority over the contents of our own mind. That is, we think that our way of knowing the mental contents of our mind is superior to the way others come to know our own mental states. From a common sense point of view we think that there is something essential in me which separates me from other individuals. Numbers of philosophers have observed that our knowledge of our own mental states or psychological states is quite different from our knowledge of psychological states of others or

³⁰ Ibid., Vol. I, p. 143.

from the knowledge of the non-psychological states. It is quite undeniable that without relying on evidence I am able to effortlessly attribute to myself beliefs, desires, intentions, hopes, fears and other psychological states. This is what constitutes self-knowledge. However the notion of self-knowledge is not as straightforward as it seems to us.

Traditionally it has been observed that philosophers have been interested in knowing the true nature of the self and inquire about the fact that how this self-knowledge is achieved? One such philosopher is Descartes. Descartes' main objective was to attain certain knowledge. In order to reach at certainty he began to doubt everything and realized that we can only be certain of our own existence as a thinking being or a doubting being. Descartes thus claims that our mind is transparent to itself unlike the external world. Detached from matters of the external world, the mind can find certainty with respect to itself. Hence, we can be certain, not just that we exist as a thinking being, but of every truth about our own mind. This point can be understood with the help of an example—"I believe that there is a car outside my house." This proposition is infallible according to Descartes as it is based on the truth about one's own belief (in this case a belief about the car). For Descartes my belief about the car is directly given to me through some means which ensures its indubitability and infallibility. That is why Descartes contends that knowledge about our own mind is given to us directly unlike the knowledge of the external world a kind of that is susceptible to doubt and falsity.

Since we have a privileged knowledge about the mental contents of the mind, each individual uses a special method to know his own mental states. This method to explore the contents of our mind is termed as special as it is available to ourselves only. For him nobody can undermine the knowledge we have of ourselves because of the special method of knowing them. The knowledge of our own mental states is infallible because the method that we apply in acquiring it is also infallible. And the special method used to determine the content of one's own mind is known as introspection. Introspection is the process by which one comes to form beliefs about his own mental states and it is usually considered as a kind of inner perception.³¹ We might form the belief that someone else is happy on the basis of perception of his behavior and inferring from that to thinking that he is happy. But according to Descartes, a person does not have to

³¹ Introspection, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/introspe/>

perceive his own behavior to know what is going on one's own mind, rather she has to introspect or look inside his mind to know whether he or she is happy.

Hence Descartes claims that if one uses the method of introspection in knowing one's own mind, one does not form false beliefs about one's state of mind. Descartes approves of the restricted and qualified assumption of the infallible thesis with this statement—

There remain sensations, emotions and appetites. These may be clearly perceived provided we take care in our judgments concerning them to include no more than what is strictly contained in our perception—no more than that of which we have inner awareness. But this is a very difficult rule to observe, at least with regard to sensation.³²

For Descartes certainty in knowledge is very important. He argues that as long as you carefully attend to your own thoughts, nothing and nobody can undercut your thinking that you exist. Thus the method used by Descartes to have the infallible knowledge of our own mind is introspection, which, in turn, means 'looking inward' or 'looking within' to acquire knowledge of our mental states. Introspection enables direct and non-inferential access to the contents of the mental states. Thus the strongest assumption on behalf of self-knowledge being distinct from other knowledge lies in the certainty and infallibility of the method of introspection. The idea that introspective beliefs about facts involving our own mental states, enjoy a unique epistemic authority or privilege, which has played an important role in traditional rationalist epistemology. According to William James, Introspection can be defined as follows—

The word introspection need hardly be defined—it means, of course, the looking into our own minds and reporting what we there discover.³³

The source of skepticism about introspection comes from the rejection of the Cartesian picture of the mind and self-knowledge. The view that one can have direct, infallible access to the contents of our mind has been rejected by many philosophers. In the next section of this chapter I am going to put forth the challenges to this introspective notion of the self by Hume, Kant and Ryle.

³² Descartes, 1644/1985, I.66, p.216 as cited in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/self-knowledge/>

³³ James, 1890/1981: 85.

1.3 Challenges to Descartes Introspective Account of Self-Knowledge

David Hume

There is a commonly held belief that there is such a thing as a 'self' that persists throughout one's life. To say there is a 'self' that persists throughout one's life is simply to say that there is something about a person that survives from birth, through childhood and adulthood, and on until death, that makes a person the same person over time. This view of self has been accepted by Descartes, according to him there is a self existing as a separate substance from the body. Descartes further claims that we can have introspective access to the contents of the self that is immediate and directly given to us. An important source of challenge to Descartes' position comes from David Hume. Hume stands in sharp contrast to Descartes' position and rejects the very idea of the substance called 'self' and thereby rejects the possibility of self-knowledge.

Now before going into a detailed account of Hume's notion of self, it is essential to provide a brief background to Hume's general philosophical views. Hume was an empiricist philosopher. His philosophy is opposite to the rationalists, he argued against the existence of innate ideas, concluding instead that humans have knowledge only of things they directly experience. His skepticism towards the notion of the self is grounded in his empiricism. Central to Hume's empiricism is the notion that there are two types of perceptions in the mind- impressions and ideas. Impressions are those types of perceptions that are derived from sense experience. For example, as I write, I have a clear and vivid impression of a computer screen in front of me. This type of perception Hume calls 'impression'. 'Ideas' on the other hand are derived from impressions. To put it differently, an impression is the type of perception a person has while experiencing a sensation, say 'pain', while an idea of an impression comes while thinking about or recalling that particular impression (the thought of 'pain'). Thus Hume divides perceptions between strong and lively "impressions" or direct sensations and fainter "ideas", which are copied from impressions.

According to Hume in order to have an idea of something, one must either have derived this idea directly from our impression, or have combined several ideas themselves derived from impressions, to form a new idea. For example, I have an idea of a golden mountain, though I have never had a sense impression of a golden mountain, even though I have never seen a golden mountain. However, I am able to have an idea of a golden mountain simply by combining the

idea of 'gold' and the idea of 'mountain' together of which I have impressions. In addition to this, Hume gives the following example--

the idea of God, as meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being, arises from reflecting on the operations of our own mind, and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom.³⁴

So we see that the most abstract, non-empirical ideas, such as the idea of God or more concrete ideas like that of Golden Mountain are ultimately grounded in sense perceptions, and we are able to form ideas of these entities by combining several ideas together to form a new idea. Now as we have brief introduction to the philosophy of Hume, let us look at Hume's arguments against the notion of a persistent self.

David Hume presented the most influential critic of the notion of self based on above mentioned empiricist ideas. Hume begins his criticism of self by reminding us that every idea is derived from an impression. Thus Hume questions- "from what antecedent impression does the idea of the self arise?"³⁵ He then goes on to say that if the idea of self is dependent on an impression, this impression must somehow continue throughout one's entire life, since self is supposed to continue throughout one's life. However, there is no one impression that we have throughout our lives; our impressions are constantly changing from one minute to the next. Hume pointed out that we do not have an impression of a persisting self, only experience or impression I have is the continuous flow of pleasure, pains, hopes, desires etc. No matter how closely I attend to my own experience, no matter how fully I notice the mental operations presently occurring "in my mind," I am never aware of the "I", which has these experiences.³⁶

Thus Hume claims that there is no persisting thing that we can properly refer to as 'self'. For Hume we are simply a collection of perceptions and thus he describes mind as a type of theatre, where "...several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations."³⁷

³⁴ Hume, 1739: 1.8.

³⁵ Ibid., Sec.1.4.

³⁶ Hume: "Epistemology".

<http://www.philosophypages.com/hy/4t.htm>

³⁷ Ibid., p.301.

To understand Hume's position on 'self' and 'self-knowledge' more clearly we have to consider few question that Hume raise—when we introspect our mind what do we see? Do we see a quality of the mind that Descartes identified as 'self?' Thus Hume begins by challenging philosophers who believe in the constant awareness of the 'self' by saying—

When I enter most intimately into what I call 'myself', I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.³⁸

The point which Hume tries to argue for is that when we try to look within ourselves, all we can observe are the thoughts that are currently going through my head: I am feeling thirsty; I am tired and so on. But I fail to see the self which is alleged to be distinct from these thoughts. Hume asserts that he can never catch himself without a perception, and never observes anything but perceptions which are in permanent flux. Thus, there is no constant impression that would give the idea of a simple and identical self. The mind is therefore nothing but a bundle of perceptions, just like bodies are nothing but bundles of qualities. To put this in Hume's words—

There is no simplicity in the mind at one time, or identity in different; whatever natural propensity we might have to imagine that simplicity and identity.³⁹

Therefore the next task for Hume is to explain how we form the idea of simplicity and identity of a self, given that we cannot derive it from any impression. One can question Hume- if there is no persistent self then why are we so inclined to ascribe an identity to ourselves throughout our lives? Why do we think ourselves to be same person as we were say 10 years ago? We might start thinking about features that can be changed without changing the underlying self. However Hume denies that there is a distinction between the various features of the self and the mysterious self that supposedly bears those features. Hume points out that when we start introspecting we find a bunch of thoughts and feelings and perceptions but never find a substance called 'self'. To put in Hume's words—when we start introspecting, “we are never

³⁸ Hume, 1739, 1.4: Sec.6.3.

³⁹ Ibid., Sec.1.4.6.4.

intimately conscious of anything but a particular perception; man is a bundle or collection of different perceptions which succeed one another with an inconceivable rapidity and are in perceptual flux and movement.”⁴⁰ So Hume notion of self can be understood as nothing more than a fleeting bundle of perceptions. According to the standard interpretation of Hume on self, he can be said to be bundle theorist, who held that the self is nothing but a bundle of interconnected perceptions linked by the property of constancy and coherence.

The second part of the answer is given by Hume is that we mistakenly think that there is a persisting self due to our confusing identity with relation to explain how such confusion occurs, let us consider the following example. Suppose there is a ‘pen’ on a table and I observe that pen for say 10 minutes. During that period of time nothing has been added to the pen, nor has anything been taken away from it. So in the strict sense one can say that there is an identity between the ‘pen’ kept 10 minutes before and the ‘pen’ viewed after 10 minutes. This identity can be said to be the strict sense of identity. Now let us take another example—suppose that there is a mango tree planted in your garden years ago and now you see a grown up mango tree in the garden. One can question—is there any identity between the mango tree planted years ago and a grown up mango tree I see now? It is clear that in this example of a tree there is not a strict sense of identity as in the case of a ‘pen’ as we notice the change in the tree during that span of time. According to Hume’s view, we relate the tree T1 and tree T2 due to the spacio-temporal continuity of the tree throughout its life. In other words we ascribe an identity only because there is a smooth transition from one day to the next where we see a tree growing over time, and thus, we say that it is the same tree. But what we ought to say is that a relation exists, not an identity in the strict sense.

Most significantly Hume goes on to argue that the kind of relation that exists in the example of a mango tree is the same kind of relation in context of the self. Just as we ascribe an identity to the mango tree because of its smooth passage from one day until the next, so too we assume an identity in persons due to the smooth passage from one thought to the next. As Hume says—

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.1.4.6.

“...identity is nothing really belonging to these different perceptions, and uniting them together; but it is merely a quality, which we attribute to them, because of the union of their ideas in the imagination, when we reflect upon them.”⁴¹

In other words, Hume thinks that we suppose that there is such a thing as a persisting self due to the fact that there is continuity from one idea to the next. And due to this continuity we come to know the changes in our mental life, as a result we wrongly think that there is a ‘self.’ Hume’s critique of Descartes proved devastating to Descartes’ position. For when Hume looked within he reported that he could not find anything in his experience corresponding to Descartes’ single, simple, continuing self. Hence, introspection, which seems to have provided a ground for Descartes to establish a self with these characteristics, is used by Hume to prove exactly the opposite view regarding the nature of the self. Introspection at most can give us knowledge of fleeting experiences, but can never provide adequate ground for asserting a substantive self.

Immanuel Kant

It is Hume’s denial of a unitary self that is said to have awoken Kant from his ‘dogmatic slumber’. Kant maintains that we must acknowledge self as a necessary condition of our experiences, believing that Hume was wrong to deny any necessary connection among mental states. Kant states that “There must be a condition which precedes all experience and which make experience itself possible;”⁴² for experiences to be brought together as mine, they must be ‘synthetically brought into being a determinate combination of the given manifold.’⁴³

In the introductory remarks to the Paralogisms, Kant presented a skeptical view with regard to self, arguing that we can have no positive knowledge about the nature of the self and rejecting the Cartesian introspective knowledge of the self. Kant disagrees with Descartes’ view that my existence as a mind is more immediately known than the existence of bodies outside me, including my own. Descartes and the subjective idealists believed that our knowledge of the self through inner sense is much more certain than our knowledge of objects of outer sense, or any other knowledge for that matter.

⁴¹ Ibid. p.1.4. Sec.6.18.

⁴² Kant, 1929: A 107.

⁴³ Ibid., p. B138.

For Kant the objective world is distinct from my subjective representation, that is, it is distinct from my thoughts and sensations of the objective world. Kant denies the introspective account of self-knowledge. According to him the self or the subject as an object of inner sense has an empirical reality just like objects of outer sense. Kant claims that one is merely aware that there is an 'I', a subject or self that accompanies one's experience and consciousness. Since one experiences it as it manifests itself in time, which Kant proposes is a subjective form of perception, one can know it only indirectly as an object rather than a subject. He moves further and held the view that the certainty of the outer objects is much higher than the certainty of the self as an object of perception. Thus Kant 'upgrades' the certainty of the outer objects to the level of the "I think", and Kant 'downgrades' the certainty of the self to the level of "appearances."⁴⁴

To put it in Kant's words—

I have no knowledge of myself as I am, but merely as I appear to myself.⁴⁵

According to Kant thinking of all kinds involve making judgments. In making judgments, an implicit "I think" accompanies every act of thought, from this it follows that every kind of rational knowledge and judgments are based on the presupposition "I Think". According to Kant, this 'I' should not be confused with the ever present subject of my thought with a permanent, real substance. This logical subject 'I' for Kant is a mere idea and not a real substance.

'I' is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever, but can only revolve around in a perpetual circle, since any judgment upon it has always already made use of its representation.⁴⁶

Kant further maintains that it is the 'presentation I think that must be capable of accompanying all other presentations, and is one and the same in all consciousness.'⁴⁷For Kant the 'I' that accompanies all my experience is not encountered experientially; it is the 'I' of transcendental apperception. The 'I' is its logical function in a synthesis that allows for the possibility of

⁴⁴ Beiser, 1781-1801: 144.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p122.

⁴⁶ Kant, 1929: A346/ B404.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p.B132.

intelligible experience; it is the 'I' that unites the contents of my experience. Therefore, unlike Descartes, Kant denies any possibility of knowledge of 'I.' For him, self is not separate from the world. They exist for us only in relation to each other. Whatever we know about the external world is only a direct, immediate, internal experience. The world appears as a mental phenomenon. We cannot know the world as a thing-in-itself that is other than as an appearance within us. To think about the world as being totally separate from the self is to think that a mere phenomenal appearance has independent existence outside of us. Thus, we cannot know a separate, thinking, non-material self or a separate, non-thinking material world because we cannot know as to what they may be by themselves, beyond being objects of our senses.

Thus Kant comes to a conclusion that the self, the "I think" that accompanies all our awareness was a construct of the activity of the mind in bringing together its sensations and cognitions. He called this the transcendental unity of apperception. Thus Kant also recognized that the self which we perceive was necessarily a phenomenon only, existing in space and time, and beyond this there must be a noumenal self, whose operations were entirely unknown to us. Kant's 'I' is similarly unknowable. I am aware that there is an 'I', subject or self that accompanies all of my experiences and consciousness. But since 'I' is only experienced in time, which is a 'subjective' form of perception, I can never know directly that 'I' that is appearing in time, as it might be "in-itself" (noumenal), outside of time. Thus we can never truly know ourselves as we might be outside of or prior to the forms through which we perceive and conceive ourselves.

The most famous statement in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is perhaps the following--

The 'I think' must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing to me.⁴⁸

Thus in order to have knowledge Kant believes that we have to presuppose the 'I' and thus the subject is always present in the knowledge of the object. However, to have knowledge of the self there is no object present to us.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. B131-32.

For both Hume and Kant there is no self which can be known through introspection. According to Quassim Cassam, if the introspective awareness is understood as involving the exercise of inner sense, Hume and Kant are both committed to Elusiveness Thesis.⁴⁹ From the first-person perspective Elusiveness Thesis can be understood as one's self is particularly unavailable to one's own awareness.

As from the above discussion it is clear that for Hume there is no idea of a self, as he cannot find any impression that gives rise to the idea of the self. Thus both Hume and Kant disagree with Descartes' introspective account of knowing one's own mind. On the other hand Descartes and the subjective idealists believed that our knowledge of the self through inner sense is much more certain than our knowledge of objects of outer sense which may be doubted. According to Quassim Cassam, this non acceptance of the introspective account of self-knowledge results into the Elusiveness Thesis of Hume and Kant.

Gilbert Ryle

As already mentioned before, Descartes' introspective account of self-knowledge can be said to be based mainly upon the above three characteristics—infallibility, self-intimation and immediacy. Descartes' philosophy of mind can be understood as the view that it is of the essence of the mind that each mind has a special, privileged access to its own contents. It is often regarded as the view according to which there is a “first-person authority” with respect to the contents of our own mental states, an authority that we do not have in the second or in the third person cases, i.e. when we ascribe mental states to others. However this epistemic status of self-awareness has been challenged by many contemporary philosophers and one such philosopher is Gilbert Ryle. Ryle in *The Concept of Mind*, Hutchinson's University Library, London, 1949, states that there is no such special first-person authority, and that our access to the contents of our own minds has no special privilege over our access to the minds of others.

Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* has a major impact in discrediting Cartesian dualism. Ryle's aim in writing this book was not to provide new information about mind, but to rectify the knowledge which already exists. Ryle refers to the concept of dualism as ‘Descartes Myth’ and as ‘the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine’. This Myth of ‘the ghost in the machine’ makes the mind an

⁴⁹ Cassam, 1994: 3.

invisible 'thing' or 'substance', which resides inside a visible substance called body. It is this concept of Descartes which Ryle intends to destroy. However Ryle does not intend to show that there is no mental life at all, rather his aim is to show that mind is not something distinct from the body. Ryle begins by attacking the term 'mind' by saying that usage of this term in sentences like 'a person's body and mind interact upon each other' or 'my mind made my hand write' amounts to logically improper conjunctions, and cause-effect propositions. His complain is that in saying 'I feel lazy', it is suggested that a person—

must have taken peep into a windowless chamber, illuminated by a very peculiar sort of light, and one to which only he has access...And when the question is construed in this sort of way, the parallel questions, 'what knowledge can one person get of the workings of another mind?' and 'how does he get it?' by their very wording seem to preclude any answer at all, for they suggest that one person could only know that another person was lazy...by peering into another secret chamber to which, ex hypothesis, he has not access.⁵⁰

The example Ryle uses to explain the Myth of dualism is to imagine someone on a campus visit of a university. He looks at the various colleges of the university, visits the classroom buildings, the library etc. At the end of the tour the visitor then asks where the university is. According to Ryle's view he has mistakenly assumed that the university is some separate entity existing apart from all of its constituents. He has mistakenly placed 'university' in the same category as 'classroom building', 'library' etc. Ryle claims that 'university' is not a separate existing entity rather it refers to the entire collection of 'classroom building', 'library' etc. all taken together. So too, Ryle contends, the 'mind' should not be thought of as some separate entity independently of its operations and the 'body'.

Further Ryle points out that the person has no direct access of any sort to the events of her own inner life. His main aim is to deny Descartes introspective view of knowing one's own mind. According to Ryle, privileged access to the working of the mind is unacceptable, since there is no secret chamber to peep into nor any special method or way of peeping into the secret chamber. Now, one can question—what is the way of knowing one's own mind according to

⁵⁰ Ryle, 1949:169.

Ryle? Ryle being a behaviorist puts forth his behaviorist position in knowing the working of the mind. It is the doctrine that the knowledge of the mental contents of the mind can be known by observing the behavior. In order to understand Ryle's position it is important to understand Ryle's meaning of introspection—

Introspection is an attentive operation and one which is only occasionally performed, whereas consciousness is supposed to be a constant element of all mental processes, and one of which the revelations do not require to be receipted in special acts of attention.⁵¹

The point that Ryle wants to emphasize is that introspection as a special infallible method of knowing one's own mind is unacceptable. He accepts that the mind is conscious of the mental process but it does not mean that we have a special method of knowing the mental states which others lack. Ryle claims that I often know that my legs are crossed, not by looking, but by exercising my faculty of proprioception. Proprioception is a special way of perceiving the dispositions of one's body. According to Ryle I cannot use proprioception to find out whether your legs are crossed or not.

Now one may question – what then Ryle has to say about the mental concepts? According to Ryle, knowledge of the mental contents is not possible through introspection or by observing the inner state of mind but for Ryle mental concepts are no more than dispositions. Importantly one should keep in mind that while rejecting introspection, Ryle does not deny that we can attain self-knowledge. According to him we can have the knowledge of our own mind in exactly the same way as we know the minds of the other's. For Ryle 'mind' means complex abilities and dispositions. Ryle contends those who think of the mind as something over and above a complex of abilities and dispositions commits 'category mistake.' Disposition is a way to behave in a certain way, that means that they will do certain things if certain situations arise. For instance to say that someone is intelligent is then to say that in given circumstances he would behave observably in ways we call intelligent. In response to Descartes introspective account of knowing one's own mind, Ryle puts forth the view that we do not need any 'private theatre' to provide stages for any extra 'objects' such as 'private' sensations or 'sense-data.'

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 165.

Ryle argues that, Descartes acceptance of the introspective account of knowing one's own mind results into a 'category mistake'. It is due to this category mistake, we falsely identify the words like 'knowing', 'believing', 'imagining', 'sensing' etc. to a private, non-spatial 'mind' which can only be known through the method of introspection.

Now one may question what does privileged access really mean? The doctrine of privileged access is something that Ryle calls 'Descartes Myth'. Ryle being a common-sense philosopher strongly disliked the appeal to privileged access. According to this doctrine—

a person has direct knowledge of the best imaginable kind of the working of his own mind. Mental states and processes are conscious states and processes, and the consciousness which irradiates them can engender no illusions and leaves the door open for no doubts. A person's present thinking, feelings and willings, his perceivings, rememberings and imaginings are intrinsically "phosphorescent"; their existence and their nature are inevitably betrayed to their owner.⁵²

To say that a person has knowledge of the best imaginable kind of the workings of his own mind is, to say that his introspectively based beliefs about his own mental states and processes cannot be mistaken. In other words, such beliefs are infallible. This is one dimension of the doctrine of privileged access. To say that one's mental states and processes are "phosphorescent" means that it rules out the possibility of ignorance with regard to the existence of one's mental states. It means that it is not possible for a person to ascribe mental states to oneself without knowing that she is in that mental state. Now, one can question—do we really have such special 'privileged access' to what we think and feel?

To conclude Ryle's position on 'privileged access' can be summarized in his own words—

I come to appreciate the skill and tactics of a chess-player by watching him and others playing chess, and I learn that a certain pupil of mine is lazy, ambitious and witty by following his work, noticing his excuses, listening to his conversation and comparing his performances with those of others. Nor does it make any important difference if I happen myself to be that pupil. I can indeed then listen to more of his conversations, as I am the addressee of his unspoken

⁵² Ryle, 1949:15.

soliloquies; I notice more of his excuses, as I am never absent, when they are made.⁵³

For Ryle 'privileged access' is merely a fiction, in Ryle's word 'The Myth'. Ryle thinks it is absurd to say that a person can be 'conscious' of smelling or thinking something because the very act of 'smelling' or 'thinking' already implies that one is aware of such occurrences. Ryle argues that since there is no special way of knowing our own mind, we know our own mind in the same way as we come to know about the minds of others, that is, by observing their behavior. Thus Ryle rejects the asymmetry between one's own mind and knowing the mental states of others. For Ryle 'private' memories are not private as he says--

The sort of things that I can find out about myself are the same as the sorts of things that I can find out about other people and the methods of finding them out are much the same.⁵⁴

To put things in a broader perspective, Ryle's position on privileged access is a necessary effect of his critique of Cartesianism. It is well known that for Descartes one can have privileged access to the contents of our own minds, knowledge of other minds is problematic. For Ryle this idea of privileged access itself was unacceptable. According to Ryle we know our own minds in the same way as we know the minds of the others by observing the behavior. Most importantly we should keep in mind that Ryle is not a philosophical behaviorist as his view on self-knowledge has been characterized as a weaker or softer version of this doctrine. The point to be focused is that Ryle does not confine his descriptions of what the agent will do to purely physical behavior rather it can be understood more clearly as a disposition to behave in various circumstances.

In chapter six of *The Concept of Mind*, after discussing the 'introspection' and 'privileged access', Ryle turns his attention to the relationship between self-knowledge and the use of the term 'I'.⁵⁵ After putting forth his behaviorist account of self-knowledge, Ryle argues that the mystery often felt in connection with the concept of the self is due to what he terms "the systematic Elusiveness of 'I'." He maintains that once the logic of the first- person pronoun is

⁵³ Ibid., pp.11-24.

⁵⁴ Barbet, 1900-1976: pp.2-6.

⁵⁵ Ryle, 1949: 195-198.

understood, there is no longer any need to feel or talk about mystery in relation to the concept of the self.

Ryle rejects the Cartesian account of mind by stating that the word 'I', indicates directly to the person who can be called 'my', it is not in itself a name; and indeed it can be used in different ways like 'I crossed the road', 'I thought hard' etc. Ryle holds that to know about our mental states we do not have to introspect rather have to base my knowledge on the behavior. According to him we can know the mental states of others in the same way as I know the mental state of myself by observing their behavior, though there must be some difference of degree.

For Ryle there are cases where 'I' or 'me' certainly cannot be replaced by 'my body' e.g. 'I remember' cannot be replaced by 'my head remembers', nor can we say 'my brain does long divisions' or 'my body battles with fatigue.' He says it makes perfect sense to say that 'I caught myself just beginning to dream, but not that I caught my body beginning to dream.'⁵⁶ According to Ryle, 'I' or 'self' can be understood as a person. He further talks of the 'systematic elusiveness of 'I'. For him all personal pronouns are 'index words', 'I' is not an extra name for an extra being; it indicates when I say or write it, the same individual who can also be addressed by the proper name of say 'Gilbert Ryle.'⁵⁷ He says 'I' in my use of it always indicates me and only indicates me whereas words 'You', 'She' and 'they' indicates different people at different times.⁵⁸

After developing certain distinctions among various functions of pronouns, Ryle calls attention to what he calls "higher order actions." Ryle draws this distinction with the help of illustrative examples between actions, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a course of action or chain-undertaking or super-action. An example of action is eating the piece of cake or whistling to your puppy; in this example there is a chain undertaking is directing or puppy training. However these actions of directing or puppy training are not actions in the direct sense. They are purposive actions or actions done of some purpose are known as 'higher-order actions.' The utterance of an 'I' sentence, he calls a "higher order performance" of self-reporting, self-exhortation..."⁵⁹ Some of the many examples cited by Ryle are replying, retaliating, scoffing, buying, rewarding,

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.181.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.180.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.189.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.188.

criticizing and approving. This concept of higher-order actions is somewhat larger than the sociological concept of interaction, because it does not pre suppose that the actions are those of two individuals who are reciprocally related to one another. The point that Ryle wants to emphasize is that the actions that are related to one's own actions are always of a higher level. However, "first-order" actions can be understood as activities or statements that can function as response to other activities or statements, in this way they are said to be dependent upon them and hence are second-order actions.

Ryle claims that this distinction between higher order and lower order actions make two important contributions in solving the difficulties connected with 'I'. Firstly it explains that a person cannot describe himself in any of the given statement since that statement cannot describe itself. Secondly, this distinction explains the difference between the pronoun 'I' and 'you.' Thus, for Ryle, the Elusiveness of the term 'I' is explained by the concept of higher order actions. Important point that Ryle wants to put forth is that 'I' or 'self' cannot be identified with body or mind. According to him, this pronoun 'I' is capable of referring to both physical and mental acts. Thus in order to criticize Descartes special method (introspective method) in knowing the mental states Ryle tried to explain the elusiveness of the pronoun 'I.'

However question of self-knowledge takes a new turn with Descartes' mind-body dualism and privileged access about the mental life. We have already seen that Descartes' view on self-knowledge has been criticized by Ryle and also by some traditional contemporary philosophers like Hume and Kant. Donald Davidson plays a very significant role as he also accepted the view of self-knowledge as well as first-person authority and privileged access. But his view is in contrast to Descartes' and Ryle's views. Davidson by rejecting the Cartesian mind body dualism puts forth his view on first-person authority and privileged access to the content of the mind. According to Davidson, first-person authority and privileged access are the real facts which we have to explore. Thus in the next chapter I will explore Donald Davidson's view about self-knowledge and first-person authority.

Chapter 2

Donald Davidson on First-Person Authority and Privileged Access

Introduction

After dismissing Descartes picture of the mind and his introspective method of knowing the contents of the mind, Donald Davidson claims that it is true that there is a special way of knowing one's own mind but this knowledge for him is not indubitable. In opposition to Descartes' position Ryle maintain that there is no asymmetry between first-person and third-person authority. For Ryle, we know our psychological self-ascriptions in the same way as we know the ascriptions of others, that is, through observing their behavior. As opposed to Ryle, Davidson accepts that there is an asymmetry between first-person and the third-person mental states. Now the question that can be asked is that how does he explains this asymmetry? Davidson explains this asymmetry with the help of first-person authority. Davidson with the help of first-person authority tried to explain the asymmetry between the knowledge of our own mental states and our knowledge of the mental states of others. However, first-person authority is not derived from a special means of knowing our own minds, like, introspection, as was suggested by Descartes and the Cartesians in general. On the contrary, Davidson suggests that this first-person authority can be explained with the help of interpretability. According to him in order to have communication and interpretation to be possible we have to presume first-person authority.

If a speaker tells a person that "I believe Indian cricket team is better than the Pakistani cricket team," the hearer will have to presume that the speaker knows what he believes, and thus is correct in uttering the sentence that he does take it to be true. In ordinary cases we do not ask for evidence with regard to such beliefs. The hearer usually trusts the speaker with regard to his beliefs without knowing anything about how accurate the speaker's belief reports have been in the past. The main aim of this chapter is to explain Donald Davidson's account of first-person authority and accompanies the idea of privileged access. Really speaking, there is no idea of privileged access in Davidson as it is based on presumption.

2.1 Understanding First-Person Authority

Traditionally first-person authority has been understood in terms of having privileged access with regard to the content of our own mind. Privileged access can be understood as a special way of knowing our own mind which others lack. In this sense Descartes talks about the authority over the content of our mind and this special access is given to the speaker of the beliefs which can be known through the method of introspection. However this special way of knowing the psychological self-ascription has been criticized by Ryle. For Ryle we know the content of our mind in the same way as we know the content of others. Davidson does not accept privileged access in the Cartesian sense though he also accepts that we have privileged access to the content of our own mind but never talk about it explicitly. Now, one can question—in what sense does Davidson talk about first-person authority without adhering to a traditional idea of privileged access?

Contemporary philosophers have been reluctant to follow Descartes and conclude that knowledge of our own mind is the knowledge about a non-physical thing, to which we have a direct and incorrigible access. According to Descartes this knowledge about our own mental states is different from the knowledge we have of the external world and to the minds of others. Descartes believed that our access to our own psychological states were epistemically more secure than our access to the psychological states of others. Thus he argues in *Meditations*, that even though he may be deceived about the existence of external world, including the minds of others, it is impossible that he is deceived about the existence of his own psychological states.

From a common sense point of view all of us presume that what someone says about her psychological states is true, though there are occasions when we learn about what we believe or want by talking with our close friends or family members, or by being guided by a therapist. These are the cases where a person may lack authority. Sometimes a psychological state is so foreign that it may seem to belong to some other person. These are the indirect ways of knowing our own mental states. The indirect ways of knowing can be said to be based on observation or evidence. When a person makes use of these indirect ways of knowing one's own mind then he lacks authority. At times a person can have psychological state from which she is detached, for instance, she may have a desire repressed years ago about her loved one and on being told by others she may come to know about her feelings.

Let us understand the point with the help of few sentences uttered by a speaker

- (a) I am feeling thirsty
- (b) I believe that it is going to rain
- (c) I am taller than you are

It is believed that the first two sentences mentioned above have a different epistemic status than the last sentence. The first two sentences are about the mental states of the speaker about which he can be said to have a special authority since they are his own psychological states. The last sentence can be verified by any one, so the special authority of the speaker lacks in this sentence. Though I can ascribe to myself a height, but I do not have a special authority of judging how taller I am from the other person. Anyone can make such comparison. In contrast to this, someone else cannot have an authority about my mental states like, my believes, desires etc. Thus it is clear there is something special about the knowledge of the mental contents of the speaker which others lack. Though there are cases where the speaker comes to know about the knowledge about his mental contents indirectly on being guided by someone else but this is not the case always. We cannot ignore the fact that there is something special about the speaker's knowledge of the psychological self-ascriptions. This special authority has been explained by Davidson as first-person authority. This special authority according to Davidson is based on presumption and it is important for us to explain what Davidson means by this authority.

In spite of the fact that few contents of the mental states are known indirectly and are based on observation but this cannot be the case always. Ordinarily we are well aware of our desires, intentions and believe, and believe that my knowledge about the content of my mental states is better than others. Now, one can ask—what is the basis of this claim? On what basis do we claim to have better knowledge of our psychological states than others?

Ordinarily we cannot deny the presence of some distinct kind of authority intrinsic to the first-person point of view. However, one can question what exactly is this 'first-person point of view' and the accompanying idea of first-person authority'? What phenomenon are we picking up when we refer to a person's psychological self-ascriptions?

Recently in a series of articles, Donald Davidson has also argued for the concept of first-person authority and privileged access like Descartes but rejected Descartes' view of knowing in a special way. Donald Davidson continued to assume that first-person authority to be understood in non-epistemic sense but remain in dispute with the idea that each one of us is infallible about our own psychological states. Now before going into a detailed account of Davidson's philosophy, it is important to understand the meaning of first-person authority. Most commonly first-person authority can be understood as the speaker's having the authority on his psychological self-ascriptions. It can also be understood as something to which the speaker has privileged access. To put it differently, first-person authority indicates a unique authority that we ordinarily have, with respect to our own psychological states.

In general, the concept of 'authority' has different senses in our language. Sometimes a person has authority in an epistemic sense, by being better situated than anyone else to report on certain facts. For instance the leading authorities in biology or medicine are epistemic authorities; they either know more or are better placed than others to learn about facts in each of their fields. Similarly a person can be said to be authoritative, by being better situated than other people to do something or to determine something or to exert control over something in a unique way. For instance, a doctor has an authority to give appropriate medicine to his patient and a teacher has authority to give grades to his students. Though each of us may in fact know what medicine to be given or may know what passing grades are, our knowledge does not secure our authority. Teacher and doctor in the above example have an authority in agential sense; it means that they are responsible for their actions. The striking question that comes to our mind is that in what sense we capture the meaning of authority in the content of self-knowledge?

Philosophers usually understand first-person authority in a purely epistemic sense consisting in each person being in a better position to know about his own psychological states. As an alternative there are non-epistemic ways of understanding the concept of authority as well. In addition to the epistemic kind of authority a person can have in knowing the facts of the mental states, there is also the type of authority a person can have by being in a better position to do something agential authority. This kind of authority is an agential authority. However according to Davidson a person also have an authority to interpret others, that is, authority of interpretability.

Davidson aims to explain the asymmetry between our knowledge of our own mental states and our knowledge of mental states of others with the help of first-person authority. This asymmetry between first and third-person knowledge of intentional states gives rise to two problems—

- (1) How can non-evidence based self-ascriptions of psychological concepts be more justified than the third-person ascriptions that are based on evidence? Generally, the beliefs that are not based on evidence are not generally thought to be more reliable than ones that are actually based on evidence.
- (2) How does Davidson reconcile externalism with an account of self-knowledge? The problem seems to be that the claim cannot be maintained in case one adheres to an externalist's account of mental content, as Davidson seems to do.

Davidson answered first question with the help of the concept of first-person authority. First-person authority seems to ground a person's authority that is not based on evidence. Now let us understand the meaning of first-person authority according to Donald Davidson. Davidson writes—

“The existence of first person authority is not an empirical discovery but rather a criterion, among others, of what a mental state is.”⁶⁰

Davidson claimed that every person enjoys special authority with respect to his own intentional states. By first-person authority Davidson means that if any person ascribes the presence of any intentional state to his/her self then it is presumed that whatever he is saying is true, unless there is evidence to the contrary.

To put it in Davidson's words—

“We should treat his utterance as if it were true unless or until, we have sufficient evidence or other epistemic grounds, to the contrary.”⁶¹

Philosophers like Gilbert Ryle have claimed that we usually apply intentional predicates such as “believe that so and so is the case” and “desire that such and such is the case” to others on the

⁶⁰ Davidson, 1995:234.

⁶¹ Davidson, 1984:101.

basis of behavioral evidence. As we have discussed in chapter first, for him my knowledge of my own mind is on a par with the knowledge of the minds of others. Both are acquired by observing respective behavior. Davidson suggests that my knowledge about the psychological self-ascriptions is not based on observation. For Davidson we normally know what we believe or intend. Even if we have evidence we do not or need not depend upon it or make use of it. As Davidson remarks---

“It is seldom the case that I need or appeal to evidence or observation in order to find out what I believe; normally I know what I think before I speak or act. Even when I have evidence, I seldom make use of it.”⁶²

Initially Davidson suggests that the authority should be understood as a presumption, the presumption that a subject is not mistaken when she attributes to herself beliefs, intentions, desires and other psychological states.⁶³

As Davidson states that---

There is a presumption – an unavoidable presumption built into the nature of interpretation—that the speaker usually knows what he means. So there is a presumption that if he knows that he holds a sentence true, he knows what he believes.⁶⁴

Davidson first-person authority is based on presumption. Whenever a speaker utters something, it is presumed to be correct as this presumption is based on the authoritative nature of the speaker. For instance, if a speaker utters a sentence—‘I am feeling hungry,’ the interpreter will accept the sentence uttered by a speaker to be true, as the speaker is authoritative about the contents of his mind. And this authority according to Davidson is solely based on presumption. Davidson claims that---

⁶² Davidson, 2001:14.

⁶³ Ibid., p.3.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.14.

The authority which rests on the fact that, whatever the objective meaning of a sentence may be, the individual subject is the only one who is in a position to authoritatively tell.⁶⁵

In general, the authoritative nature with respect to psychological self-ascriptions is presumed by all. Such authority is thought to be directly accessible to the subject about their own mental states. This immediacy of the psychological self-ascriptions is available to the first-person rather than third-person. For Davidson this knowledge of the mental states of the speaker is not based on evidence. This is the base for an asymmetry between the first and third person knowledge of intentional states as the latter is based on evidence whereas the former is not.

Based on the above discussion of Davidson's view on first-person authority we can summarize mainly three characteristics of first-person authority namely--immediacy, authority and fallibility. Davidson regards self-knowledge as immediate, he says---

“What I know about the contents of my own mind I generally know without appeal to evidence or investigation. There are exceptions, but the primary of unmediated self-knowledge is attested by the fact that we distrust the exceptions until they can be reconciled with the unmediated.”⁶⁶

Davidson admits that first-person knowledge is directly known. It can be understood as some kind of immediacy without appeal to evidence or investigation. For Davidson this immediacy is something that is understood in terms of non-evidentiality or lacks evidence or is not based on observation or inference. This immediacy can be further explained with the help of an example-- if a person believes that she is sad, this belief of her is self-warrant or self-justified. Her believe that she is sad is justified by the fact that she believes that she is sad; no further evidence is required to prove this belief. However, this immediacy is not due to privileged access and we should not confuse it with Cartesian notion. This immediacy can be understood with the help of privileged access. Davidson believes that we have privileged access to the content of our mind and this knowledge is not based on evidence. However whatever is known directly should be based on evidence.

⁶⁵ Ibid.,12.

⁶⁶ Davidson, 2000: 205-20.

Now, one can question how can a person have privileged access to the content of his own mind without evidence? Do we have privileged access to what we are intentionally doing? In order to answer these questions we should first understand what does privileged access mean? Traditionally privileged access has been understood in terms of introspective account but Davidson does not accept privileged access in this sense. First and foremost we should identify the relevant range of propositions to which we have privileged access. These ranges are usually specified by subject matter-- propositions about our own current propositional attitudes, propositions about our own sensations or propositions about our own intentional doing.

Intuitively, we believe that self-knowledge has some sort of special epistemic status-- we know what others are thinking too, but only in an indirect, inferential way. This difference suggests that self-knowledge is in some sense privileged. Generally claims about direct knowledge are based on evidence but this is not the case when the objects of knowledge are one's own mental states. Since Descartes, most of the philosophers hold the view that we can know the content of our mental states in a privileged way that is available to no one else. The basic idea of privileged access is that we can find out about the contents of our mental states without an empirical investigation and for Descartes this knowledge of my psychological self- ascription is infallible.

Discussing self-knowledge, Davidson never talks about privileged access explicitly, but he still believes that there is an evident asymmetry between first-person and third-person points of view. This point can be understood more clearly with the help of an example of privileged access in the sense of imagination that Davidson discusses—I say to you: ‘form an image of your grandmother,’ and if I ask-- how do you know that the image is of your grandmother? According to Davidson this question is ill-conceived. The point that Davidson wants to put forth is that in the above example a person can be wrong about the image of her grandmother but the image will be of that person only and one cannot question about it.⁶⁷ The reason why the image cannot be questioned is that the person has privileged access to his/ her mental contents. Thus access to my mental content would be superior to yours. For Davidson privileged access lies in presumptive acceptability of first-person authority. Davidson claims that the first-person access is not in fact a kind of access one may have to the mind of another subject as the knowledge of other person is

⁶⁷ Heil, 1988: 247.

based on evidence but the knowledge about the content of one's own mind is not based on any evidence. To put it in Davidson's words—

The privileged status we enjoy with respect to the contents of our own minds is analogous. That is, in introspecting and describing our thoughts we are not reporting episodes that appear before our mind's eye. Were that so, we should be at a loss to account for the privileged status such reports are routinely accorded. The access I enjoy to my own mental contents would be superior to what is available to you, perhaps, but only accidentally so. Its superiority would be like that I enjoy with respect to the contents of my trouser pockets.⁶⁸

Davidson conflates first-person authority with privileged access. He claims that since we are authoritative about our psychological self-ascription and this authority is based on presumption. Thus, for Davidson there is something special in knowing the contents of the mind and its specialty lies in the fact that it is not available or given to anyone else. So Davidson's notion of privileged access is based on presumptive acceptability. As Davidson claims—

The difference follows, of course, from the fact that the assumption that I know what I mean necessarily gives me, but not you, knowledge of what belief I expressed by my utterance. It remains to show why there must be a presumption that speakers, but not their interpreters, are not wrong about what their words mean. The presumption is essential to the nature of interpretation—the process by which we understand the utterances of a speaker. This process cannot be the same for the utterer and for his hearers.⁶⁹

The point that Davidson wants to emphasize is that there is no guarantee that the hearer will interpret the words uttered by the speaker correctly. But one cannot deny the fact that the words of the speaker will be automatically understood by the hearer.

For Davidson it is natural to know what I believe or intend, unlike the knowledge of others knowledge about our own mental states is not based on evidence.

Davidson says—

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.248.

⁶⁹ Davidson, 2001: 12.

“People generally know without recourse to inference from evidence, and so in a way that others do not, what they themselves think, want or intend.”⁷⁰

So we can see that Davidson claims that I can know the beliefs or other propositional attitudes of others from what she says and how she behaves that is from the empirical investigation. But my knowledge about my own beliefs or any other propositional states is not based on any evidence or observation. Davidson further points out that we do have privileged access to the psychological self-ascriptions but this does not imply that we have infallible knowledge about the contents of our own mind. He claims that all the propositional attitudes of a subject are liable to error.

As per our discussion, one thing is clear that for Davidson there is something special about the knowledge about our own mental states. Now the threat to this Davidson’s account of self-knowledge is that it is claimed that direct, non-inferential self-knowledge of our own mental states is not possible if externalism is true. One can question Davidson-- how can we have privileged access to our own thoughts if their meanings are determined externally?

According to Davidson, is not externalism but a certain ‘picture of the mind’ in which beliefs about the contents of one’s mental states are taken to be based on inward glimpses of those states or on the grasping of particular entities. He recommends that we abandon the notion that way. Once we do so, we remove at least one of the reasons for supposing that externalism undermines privileged access.⁷¹

The strong position represented by Descartes is known as internalism or the idea that an individual’s thoughts depend upon nothing but the individual who has them. Philosophers those who deny internalism are in favor of externalism, the idea that the external environment does play a role in determining the contents of our thoughts. Many of our mental states such as beliefs, desires, intentions etc. are internal mental states or mental states with content.⁷²

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.48.

⁷¹ Heil, 1988:247.

⁷² Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Externalism About Mental Content
<http://Plato.stanford.edu/entries/content-externalism/>

Externalists' with regard to mental content says that in order to have certain types of intentional mental states like beliefs, desires etc., it is necessary to relate to the environment. On the contrary, there are internalists, who deny the view accepted by the externalists and affirms that intentional mental states depend solely on our intrinsic properties. The question that comes to our mind is – if the contents of our mind depend on the external world then how can we have privileged access to the contents of our mind? Thus one can say that the strong externalist's position possesses a threat to privileged self-knowledge.

For Davidson the externalist's threat to privileged self-knowledge rests on a faulty picture of the mind. According to Davidson the subject knows what he thinks, intend and beliefs. Putnam and Burge talk about externalism in a different sense. Unlike Putnam and Burge, Davidson tried to hold his externalists position along with the consistency of privileged access by putting forth the doctrine of first-person authority of the mental contents. However in the next section of this chapter I will discuss the externalist's position accepted by Putnam and Burge and how Putnam and Burge posed a challenge to Davidson's first-person authority.

2.2 Putnam and Burge on Externalism

In the mid of 1970's main difficulties raised in the domain of philosophy of mind was a distinction between internalism and externalism. Philosophers who accept internalists view believe that the content of the mind is determined by their 'internal' features, that is, by something that is inside the person's mind. In contrast to internalists there are externalists who believe that the content of a person's mind depends upon the external factors. They believe that at least some properties of the content of thoughts are relational or are related to the external environment and hence the content of these thoughts are to be individuated by reference to factors that are independent of the purely mental factors. Externalists such as Hilary Putnam, Tyler Burge and Donald Davidson argue that in some sense the content of the mind depends upon these external factors. The externalist's position of Hilary Putnam can be best understood with the help of the doctrine-- 'meanings aren't in the head.'⁷³

⁷³ Putnam, 1975b: 227.

Externalism is not a homogeneous position, there can be a division between social (linguistic) or physical (causal) externalism and reductive or non-reductive versions of it. However I will not go into the details of this division of externalism rather will discuss Hilary Putnam's and Tyler Burge's externalist's position and Donald Davidson's response to both these externalists. However, Burge's externalism is a kind of social externalism (linguistic or non-individualistic externalism. Putnam and Davidson are physical (causal externalist's) though there is a difference in the approach of both these philosophers. Both Putnam and Davidson disagree over the content of thought. The central disagreement of Davidson with Putnam is concerns the place in which meaning is to be found. For Putnam meaning is solely dependent upon the external world and according to him there is nothing in the head thus a person cannot be said to be authoritative with respect to the content of his/her own mind. Contrary to this view, is Davidson's externalist position, according to which the meaning of the mental content is in part depends upon the external factors. Davidson by accepting the externalist position does not give up the authoritative nature of the self and privileged access to the mental contents.

Descartes' position can be understood as an internalist position because for him the knowledge of the content of the mind solely depends upon the internal factors. Thus Descartes accepts privileged access to the content of the mind; the content of mind which is determined purely internally is available to only the person whose mental content it is. That is why the subject is authoritative with respect to the knowledge of his own mind. To say that the subject has privileged access to the contents of its own mind means that the speaker knows the contents of his mind immediately or directly without any evidence or inference from utterance and actions.

However this view of privileged access to the contents of one's mind is also accepted by the externalists, like Donald Davidson. Thus one can say that externalism in the philosophy of mind has been thought by many to pose a serious threat to the claim that subject is authoritative with regard to the content of his own mind. Davidson in his work tried to show that denying internalism does not mean denying authoritative self-knowledge. He shows that all the three types of knowledge namely-- knowledge of the external world, knowledge of our own mind and knowledge of others should be taken together. In the next section I will further talk about this triangularity view of Davidson in a greater detail. In this section I will discuss the externalist's

position of Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge, I will also put forth a detailed account of Davidson's response to both these externalist's.

As mentioned earlier externalism is a view that the meaning of a term is determined by factors external to the speaker. According to an externalist position by Hilary Putnam, one can claim without contradiction that two speakers could be in exactly the same mental state at the same time of utterance, and yet mean different things by that utterance. Putnam tried to prove this in his famous Twin Earth experiment. Twin Earth is a planet (elsewhere in the galaxy) that is exactly like Earth except for one thing; on the Twin Earth, the stuff they call 'water' is not H₂O, but a different chemical formula say 'XYZ'. If on Twin Earth, the substance that looks, feels and functions like 'water' in fact has a different chemical composition than 'water' does, then despite the identity of the mental images associated with 'water' in the mind of persons staying in Twin Earth and Earth, we would not say that there is 'water' on Twin Earth.

Moreover, Hilary Putnam was the first philosopher to clearly and explicitly show the threat externalism poses for self-knowledge. Putnam argues that what words mean depends on more than 'what is in the head.'⁷⁴ For Putnam, the meaning of a word depends upon the relations that word bears to the external world. Thus, as Putnam says knowledge of mental states involving these words depends upon the external factors, so we cannot have direct access to our mental contents. Hence self-knowledge is threatened by the Putnam's externalist's thesis.

Now, one can question-- is externalism compatible with the privileged access or first-person access to the contents of our own mental states? The question whether externalism is compatible with the idea of privileged access to our own mental states has provoked much debate in the recent philosophical literature. The argument against the compatibilists has been offered by Mckinsey, Brown and Boghossian but I will concentrate mainly on the incompatibilist accounts of Putnam and Burge, and my main concern is to show how Davidson argues for the compatibility of externalism with authoritative self-knowledge.

The threat externalism poses on self-knowledge comes as a result of the theory of meaning put forward by Putnam in "Meaning of 'Meaning'." Before going into a detailed account of Putnam

⁷⁴ Davidson, 2001: 18.

externalism, it is important to explore Putnam's theory of meaning and its implications. Traditionally, there are mainly two assumptions for determining the meaning of a word—

- (1) An individual's psychological state determines the meaning of a word. It means that to know the meaning of a term T is just a matter of being in a certain psychological state.
- (2) The meaning (intension) of a word is determined by its extension (in the sense that sameness of intension entails sameness of extension).⁷⁵

Putnam claims that these two assumptions cannot be jointly satisfied. Putnam's theory of meaning rejects the first assumption while retains the second. The first claim is accepted mainly by the internalists who believe that the meaning of the word depends upon the psychological state of a person. Being an externalists Putnam rejects the first assumption.

In order to understand the details of Putnam's position let us first understand the difference between the two sense of psychological states-- narrow sense and wide sense. The narrow sense of psychological state can be understood in terms of a psychological states being individuated solely by factors inside the head. They do not presuppose the existence of any individual other than the subject, or what others are thinking, believing, hoping, desiring, or what the external world is like. Whereas the wide sense of the psychological state can be understood as psychological states that are individuated by what goes beyond the person's mind. In this we individuate and identify mental states in terms of relations to objects, other than the subject.⁷⁶ Thus Putnam identifies the narrow psychological state with the Descartes intentional state. Putnam believes that none of the mental states satisfies both the psychological conditions.

A narrow content of a particular belief is a content of that belief that is completely determined by the individual's intrinsic proprieties. An intrinsic property of an individual is a property that does not depend at all on the individual's environment.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Putnam, 1975b: 219.

⁷⁶ Davidson, 2001: 20.

⁷⁷ Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/content-narrow/>

However, for Davidson there is no reason to support that the mental states do not satisfy both the above two conditions. Indeed what Davidson in “Knowing One’s Own Mind” is trying to prove is that the first-person authority can be applied to the mental states that identify itself by reference to the external world. The question one can pose on Putnam’s externalists position is that --how can one say that the mental states that depends upon the external world are not known by the person who is in that state?

According to the traditional philosophical view the psychological states have been understood in the narrow sense of the term (results that the meaning is in the head). This is the idea that Putnam attacks. Putnam and Davidson are sympathetic to Putnam’s attack on narrow content and internalism. They argue that if words in a language are used to describe the contents of an agent's thought, so it is essential for an agent to know the meaning of the content of thoughts. For them the content of thought depends upon the external factors so it cannot be known through introspection.

An important question for the theory of meaning is whether meaning is a private mental entity or an abstract public entity? This point can be understood more clearly with the help of an example- when a person utters a word say ‘cow,’ is the meaning of this word a mental concept or, a concept that is privately owned by the person or its meaning is some sort of abstract public entity? Or by uttering the word ‘cow’ do we understand its meaning simply by the picture we get in our head which is private to the speaker or is it simply understood as that thing to which everyone in a linguistic community refers to, when they say the word ‘cow’? In the ‘Meaning of Meaning’ Putnam argues that meaning is not a mental entity. He says that ‘meanings just aren’t in the head.’⁷⁸

In order for us to understand Putnam’s position in detail, it is necessary to understand meanings of terms like extension and intension. When we say that a word means something extensionally, we mean that the extension of a term is the complete set or class of things to which a term refers. For example- “animals with tail” refers to ‘elephants,’ ‘tigers,’ and all other animals that belong to the class of animals with tail. However intension of a term refers to the mental association one has with certain term or to put it differently it refers to the concept or idea one gets in one’s head

⁷⁸ Putnam, 1975b: 227.

when one hears a term. For instance- when I hear the word 'dog,' I get a picture in my head of a creature with certain characteristics and based on this I can distinguish this mental image of 'dog' from other creatures say cat, horse and so on. Now the difficulty with the terms 'intension' and 'extension' that Putnam realize is that each is meant to convey meaning, yet neither term capture the meaning fully.

The traditional theory of meaning holds that two terms can have the same extension and yet differ in their intension. For instance, the terms 'animals with tail' and 'animals with heart' share the same extension though they do not denote the same intension or concept. Putnam claimed that the traditional theory of meaning has taken it for granted that it is impossible for two terms to share the same intension and yet different in extension. With the help of the Twin Earth thought experiment Putnam wants to counter this traditional position with regard to meaning of words, in particular meanings of natural kind terms. The point which Putnam wants to emphasize is that two things may have different extensions even when they can have same intensions.

So, in order to understand Putnam's externalist position, it is important to understand the theory of meaning put forward by him in "The Meaning of 'Meaning',"⁷⁹ with the Twin Earth example. He illustrated "Twin Earth" argument to put forward the view that environmental factors play a substantial role in determining meaning. The central idea of this argument as has been mentioned earlier is that "the meanings aren't in the head."

Hilary Putnam presented a variety of arguments for his externalists position, the most famous of them is the 'Twin Earth thought experiment.' Putnam's Twin Earth Experiment goes as follows—

Twin Earth is a planet (elsewhere in the galaxy) that is exactly like Earth except for one thing; on the Twin earth, the stuff they call 'water' is not H₂O, but a different chemical formula say 'XYZ.' If on Twin Earth, the substance that looks, feels and functions like 'water' in fact has a different chemical composition than 'water' does, then despite the identity of the mental images associated with 'water' in the mind of persons staying in Twin Earth and Earth, we would not say that there is 'water' on Twin Earth. Furthermore, Putnam claims that the first speaker refers to the substance 'water' when she uses the word 'water'; her Twin refers to a different substance 'twater' when

⁷⁹.Ibid., pp. 215- 271.

she uses the word 'water.' With the help of this psychological experiment Putnam wants to prove that even when the psychological states of the person (that is, their narrow psychological states) are identical, they extensionally refer to and hence mean different things by the same words.

The point that Putnam is trying to make is that it would be false to say that the psychological states are solely responsible for determining the extension of a word.⁸⁰ Putnam claims that the intension is determined by the extension, for the meaning of a term can be understood through its extension. Putnam concludes that what a person means or intends with a thought is determined by more than that person's internal psychological state. According to Putnam, the extension of a term is not fixed; it depends upon the external factors. Thus the meaning of the term 'water' can be understood in terms of its extension, that is, either H₂O or XYZ, depending upon the external environment where the speaker is situated.

So, one can say that in "The Meaning of 'Meaning'," Putnam develops an indexical theory of meaning. An indexical term is one that has a fixed linguistic meaning while its extension changes depending on the context of usage.⁸¹ According to Putnam's idea of division of linguistic labour, we use words without knowing the exact meaning of it. The exact meaning is determined by experts in the community. For instance, the meaning of the word 'water' as 'H₂O' is fixed by the community of experts like scientists. Idea that there is a division of linguistic labour in a community and we non-experts believe that meanings are same. But they mean different things because the meaning is determined by the linguistic experts of their community. In the above mentioned thought experiment Putnam claimed 'water' is indexical to our world and its reference is thereby fixed for all possible worlds. Since the liquid referred to as 'water' on the Twin Earth does not bear the same relation to the 'water' in the actual world, and cannot be said to be the extension of 'water'. It is in view of this that Putnam says that the term 'water' does not have the same meaning in the two worlds, though people living on Earth and those who live on Twin Earth have the same thing in mind. Putnam uses the Twin Earth thought experiment in the context of linguistic meaning.

⁸⁰ The term intension can be understood as meaning and extension can be understood as the set of things. The point that Putnam wants to focus is that if two things have different extension then they will have different intensions. This can be understood with the help of an example: The meaning of 'rabbit' can be understood as that which belongs to the set of all rabbits. Thus in the above experiment the word 'water' have different extension's viz. H₂O, XYZ. So according to Putnam the meaning of the word 'water' will be understood differently by different people.

⁸¹ Hilary Putnam, 1975: 231.

Putnam, based on this indexical view of meaning claimed that meaning is external not only to an individual's head but also to society's head. The most important aspect of Putnam's Twin Earth argument is not to show that meaning is not individualistic but to show that meaning is not in the head or as Putnam puts it "the collective mental states of all the members of the linguistic society."⁸² It is clear in the Twin Earth thought experiment that people belonging to two different worlds may apply exactly the same criterion to the word 'water' i.e. transparent, odorless, drinkable etc. However, the extension of the word 'water' in both Earth and Twin Earth is different, so their meanings are also different. In spite of the fact that people belonging to both the worlds may think about the liquid 'water' in the same way, but that as such does not determine the extension of the term 'water.' Therefore for Putnam the meaning of the word does not lie in the head rather it lies in the physical nature of things. In this way Putnam's externalist's theory can be properly described as physical externalism.

Davidson provides a very short but effective argument to counter Putnam's externalist position by using the example of sunburn.

My sunburn isn't a condition of my skin. My sunburned skin may be indistinguishable from someone else's skin that achieved its burn by other means; yet one of us is really sunburned and the other not.⁸³

Davidson claims that sunburn is only sunburn if it is caused by the sun. Yet there may be physically identical burn caused by heat of a lamp or so. We cannot call this sunburn. Thus Davidson suggests that what individuates the two states is external to the physical state itself.⁸⁴

After discussing Putnam's physical externalism, my aim is to discuss social externalism of Tyler Burge. Different version of externalism defended by Tyler Burge is social externalism. Following Putnam's thought experiment Burge makes use of similar arguments to show that social institutions also play a role in determining the contents of some beliefs and thoughts. Burge develops thought experiments in which he keeps all the factors that are internal to a person's social environment. He thereby intends to show that the social environment takes part in

⁸² Ibid., 141.

⁸³ Davidson, 2001:31.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 31.

determining the content of the beliefs of a person. The idea that mental contents are broad is the idea that it is not determined entirely by an individual's intrinsic properties, but is determined in part by features of the individual's environment. But if the content of my beliefs is not determined entirely by my internal states, what else could determine it? How could anything other than my intrinsic properties determine what I think and believe? The examples just discussed point to two different sorts of environmental factor. Putnam's example of Oscar and his Twin Earth duplicate focuses on the contribution of natural environment. The crucial idea here is that when we have thoughts or beliefs about natural kinds, we often do not know what the essential features of those kinds are, even though we assume that there are such essential features. In such cases, what we are thinking about depends not only on internally available factors, but also on facts about the physical, chemical, or biological makeup of the kinds we are thinking about.

Burge's 'arthritis' example by contrast, focus on the contribution of the social environment. In our thoughts about many kinds of things, including natural kinds but also including kinds invented by humans, such as furniture or contracts, we assume that others may have more expertise than we do about what is and what is not included the kind in question. Thus, what we are thinking about depends not only on our intrinsic properties, but also on expert opinion. We defer to the experts with regard to what exactly we are thinking about. For this reason, this sort of contribution of the social environment is sometimes referred to as "semantic deference."⁸⁵

In "Individualism and Self-Knowledge," Tyler Burge presents the most famous compatibilists position with respect to privileged access to our own thoughts. The problem all compatibilists face is the incompatibility of privileged access to one's thoughts. According to Putnam's thought experiment the content of one's thoughts is dependent upon ones external environment. Burge contends that even though certain external conditions must obtain for certain thoughts to be what they are, knowing that the thought has occurred does not depend upon knowing that those external conditions actually obtain.

However, Burge externalism rests upon four claims--

⁸⁵ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/content-narrow/>

- (1) Our thoughts are partially individuated by external physical objects or the shared practices of a community of language users. For instance, to say that ‘water is wet’ I should have a causal contact with ‘water’ and the experts in a community have to define ‘water’ as H₂O.
- (2) Thoughts are self-referential in nature, which is directly accessible to consciousness. For instance: “My thinking of my red car.”
- (3) It is not necessary to know the enabling conditions of a thought in order to know the contents of that thought. Means that it is not necessary that empirically an object should be present in front of me to have thought content.
- (4) Knowledge of one’s own thoughts inherits its empirical component from the concepts that these thoughts employ.⁸⁶

The heart of Burge’s compatibilism is that though the content of a first-order thought depends on the environment, the special epistemic status of second-order judgment about first-order content is not threatened. According to Burge the content of the first-order thought is embedded or contained in the second order judgment. Thus, the second-order judgment is not only self-referential, it is self-verifying since “making the judgment itself makes it true”—no empirical investigation is needed to know the second-order judgment.⁸⁷

Burge adopts a restricted Cartesian conception of knowing one’s thoughts directly and authoritatively. The restricted Cartesian view is simply that first-order thoughts are the most probable. The direct and authoritative instances of self-knowledge are self-verifying second order judgments for Burge. He calls these judgments as basic self-knowledge. Burge does not extend basic self-knowledge to knowledge of beliefs, desires etc. because he does not agree with Descartes claim that the introspective knowledge allows us to know the psychological self-ascriptions without the knowledge of the external world.

Moreover, Burge claims that our thoughts can be divided into ways namely, content of thought and attitude of thought.⁸⁸ Here attitude refers to my beliefs and content depends upon the external world. This point can be understood with the help of an example—“I am thinking of a

⁸⁶ Burge, 1988: 649-63.

⁸⁷ First order thought can be understood with the help of an example: ‘Water is wet’ is first-order thought and ‘I believe that water is wet’ is second-order thought.

⁸⁸ Sven Bernecker, “Externalism and the Attitudinal Components of Self Knowledge”, Stanford University, 1996, pp. 262-275.

red car,” here my attitude refers to ‘my thinking’ and the content of my thought is ‘red car.’ Hence for Burge my thought refers to both my thinking and to the external world. Likewise, Burge applies this principle to all thoughts which are said to have a ‘self-referential’ quality.⁸⁹

The point that Burge is trying to make is that unlike Putnam’s externalism where the mental contents solely depends upon the external factors, for Burge in order to know what someone is thinking is also necessary to know something about individual’s social environment. This may be because two speakers belong to a linguistic community that attaches different significance to the use of the same term. Furthermore the point that Burge wants to focus is that the belief content is not fixed. The content of a term depends upon the linguistic community.

According to Putnam’s Twin Earth thought experiment, a person in the same mental state on Earth and Twin Earth would have different thoughts if the two environments are different. One cannot tell by mere introspection whether a person is having Earth thoughts or Twin Earth thoughts. For Putnam meaning of a thought solely depends upon the external factors. Burge further goes on to say that suppose the two persons P1 and P2 switch their places from Earth to Twin Earth. Then P1’s thought about ‘water’ would be ‘Twater’ and P2’s thought about ‘water’ would be ‘water.’ It is argued that since both P1 and P2 are unaware of the chemical composition of both the substance, both individuals share the same concept of ‘water’. If the individuals were unknowingly switched between the two environments; he could not tell which environment his thoughts were about, and he would not feel any difference. Their thought about the ‘water’ would not change.

Extending on Putnam’s claim that meaning has to be studied non-individualistically, Burge claims further that beliefs have to be studied non-individualistically as well. The meaning or concept in one’s belief varies with differences in social connotations, thus the content of one’s belief is determined by what goes on in the social environment.

Burge claims—

“In most of the cases, communal conventions about the meaning of a speaker’s words tend to override what a speaker mistakenly associates with his words in determining what he says and even sometimes, believes.”⁹⁰

⁸⁹Tyler Burge, 1986:3-45.

The essential features of social externalism can easily be shaped by using famous Burge's arthritis' example. This is the very famous thought experiment given by Burge, which proceeds in three steps:

First, Burge hypothesizes a speaker who is generally competent in English. This speaker for Burge has a large number of attitudes commonly attributed with the word 'arthritis'. In addition the speaker believes falsely that he has developed 'arthritis in his thigh'. The belief is false, Burge argues since unknown to the speaker, in his community 'arthritis' does not apply to ailments outside the joints. Second, Burge considers a counterfactual world where arthritis not only applies to the disease of joints but to various other rheumatoid ailments. Thus for Burge, the word 'arthritis' expresses a different concept in this counterfactual world. He concludes that the speaker who utters the sentence 'I have arthritis in my thigh' is not misusing the word but using it correctly. For him meaning and mental content vary with social environment.

Thus, the point that Burge is focusing is that the individual by looking inside the head, would not be able to tell the difference between the two environments. It does suggest that there is something about the nature of one's thought content such that some aspect is fixed by factors external to the individual. Thus, for him the meaning of a word and the associated mental state, partly depends upon the social factors.

Burge's attack on individualism is not built as a theory of meaning rather as a theory of mental content. He wants to emphasize that whatever expressions mean in the social environment, will be what they mean in the content of the individual's belief. When there is a gap between the social meaning and the believer's understanding of the word, it is the social meaning, and not what the individual understands, that determines what the individual really believes. Thus Burge aims to show that meaning is determined by the collective mental states of society.

Davidson criticizes Burge and rejects his idea that "what we mean and think is determined by the linguistic habits of those around us".⁹¹ For Burge although two speakers understand the word 'arthritis' in a different ways they will mean the same thing by the utterance of their word and should be reported as having a same belief. Davidson does not accept this and argues that it is

⁹⁰ Burge, 1978:134-135.

⁹¹ Davidson, 2001:26.

incorrect to say that both the speakers are reported in the same way. The point that Davidson wants to put forth is that as both the speakers mean different things, their utterance of words would mislead the audience (unless one defines the meaning of the word 'arthritis' according to both the speakers).

Although Burge is a compatibilist to a certain extent as he does accept social factors like Davidson. But Davidson's position is much stronger. Davidson does not consider Burge's thought experiment as persuasive as his, because Davidson defends that self-knowledge and the knowledge of the external world are interdependent.⁹² The point that Davidson focuses is that we need world knowledge as well as the knowledge of the other minds in order to know our thoughts.

2.3 Davidson's Response to Putnam and Burge

Putnam's Twin Earth thought experiment showed that two people could be in exactly similar physical and mental states yet mean two different things by the same word. As Putnam's externalist position is based on the assumption that meanings aren't in the head. Davidson responds to Putnam's externalist position by asserting that if meanings aren't in the head then the meaning cannot be grasped by the mind in the way it is required by the first-person authority. Davidson's externalism is based on the idea of authority. For Davidson in order to have authoritative self-knowledge, the knowledge of the outside world is essential.

Contrary to Putnam's externalist position, Davidson claims that meanings can be in the head even though what I mean may depend on things in the outside world. He also claims that meanings do not stand in the head as 'objects' in the way that philosophers have traditionally spoken of meaning. In this context, Davidson questions the very idea that to mean and therefore to believe something we have to accept an object that is present before or given to the mind. As Davidson claims—

⁹² Davidson, 1988: 665.

The basic difficulty is simple; if to have a thought is to have an object before the mind, and the identity of the object determines what the thought is, then it must always be possible to be mistaken about what one is thinking.⁹³

The central disagreement of Davidson with Putnam's externalist position is about the place of meaning of the mental content. Though, Davidson agrees with Putnam that the meaning of the content of the mental states is dependent upon the relation to the external world. In addition to this view Davidson argues that contents of mental states depend upon the relations to society and the rest of the environment.⁹⁴In spite of his sympathies towards both Putnam's and Burge's externalistic position, he says—

I am here concerned with the puzzling discovery that we apparently do not know what we think—at least in the way we think we do. This is a real puzzle if, like me, you believe it is true that external factors partly determine the contents of thoughts, and also believe that in general we do know, and in a manner others do not, what we think. The problem arises because admitting the identifying and individuating role of external factors seems to lead to the conclusion that our thoughts may not be known to us.⁹⁵

In response to Putnam's Twin Earth thought Experiment, Davidson notes that in such cases avowals about 'water' switch their truth-value depending on the planet in which the sentence is uttered. Putnam asserts that the sentence, 'here is a glass of water' has different truth-values depending on where the concept of 'water' was learnt. For someone who learnt it on Earth and speaks on Twin Earth not knowing where she is, to say 'here is a glass of water' is false; but to say the same sentence on Earth turns out to be true.⁹⁶

Davidson claims that 'if the identity of objects determines what the thought is about, it must always be possible to be mistaken about what one is thinking. For unless one knows *everything* about the object, there will always be senses in which one does not know what object it is.'⁹⁷To put it differently Davidson criticizes Putnam's claim that 'there is nothing in the head' and we get knowledge of the mental contents from the outside world by saying that if the objects

⁹³ Davidson, 2001:37.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 31-38.

⁹⁵ Ibid.,25.

⁹⁶ Ibid.,33.

⁹⁷ Ibid.,35.

determine the content of our thought then we will always be mistaken about what we are thinking. He claims that my complete, correct empirical knowledge about the object is not possible. Therefore we cannot solely rely on the outside world for knowing our own world. Davidson criticizing Putnam's externalism further claims that 'to have a thought is to have an object before the mind',⁹⁸ means that if our knowledge of the mental content assumes a possibility of objects being present outside our mind then the meaning of propositions results into possible interpretations made by the subject. Davidson claims that if we will accept the view that objects are being present outside our mind then the world will be interpreted differently by different people. To put it in Davidson words—

The idea would be that different schemes or languages constitute different ways in which what is given in experience may be organized...Perhaps no way we could in general compare or evaluate them.⁹⁹

According to Davidson, Burge too compromise on first-person authority in his explanation of social externalism. According to social externalist, a person can believe the content of his thought even on the basis of a partial understanding of the content (that is, it may be true that I believe that I have arthritis even if I misconstrue the definition of arthritis such that I think it applies only to one specific case of joint inflammation when the correct definition of arthritis allows for various causes of joint inflammation). Now, according to Davidson if a person is partially misinformed about the meaning of the words he uses to express his beliefs, he must also then be partially misinformed about his belief so expressed.

Davidson suggests that it is a mistake to assume that the intended meaning of one's word is the same as the socially determined meaning of the same word. For instance, when I claim that 'Carl has arthritis', it is possible that I do so on the basis of my understanding of the word 'arthritis' which is totally different from the socially 'correct' definition of the word. In this case my understanding of the term may mean one thing which may be different from the socially accepted definition of the word. For Burge in both the cases the word 'arthritis' will mean the same thing whereas this claim is unacceptable by Davidson. Davidson claims that in both the cases a person mean different thing as there is a difference in the thoughts.

⁹⁸ Ibid..36.

⁹⁹ Ibid..41.

Davidson further unfolds the view that the meaning can be in our mind. He suggests that the private linguist finds concepts in her mind whose meaning is self-restricted and is liable to interpretation even by the possessor. Davidson envisages so the notion of the ‘natural history’ of our concepts¹⁰⁰ by which the internal process of conceptualization turns environmental inputs into mental episodes capable of bringing about meaning. He assumes that the content of thoughts cannot be self-determined, meaning thereby that a subject cannot determine the truth-value of a thought, not because he cannot know it, but because the subject is connected with the environment in which he lives.

Therefore Davidson says that we ought to reject Burge’s manner in which social factors determine the meaning of thoughts and beliefs without rejecting that the meaning of thoughts are socially determined. According to Davidson, the natural history of a word (when the word is learned and used), is the only proper explanation of how social factors determine meaning. For him an individual cannot have thoughts without having language. Davidson says “without one creature to observe another, the triangulation that locates the relevant objects in a public space could not take place.”¹⁰¹ So it is important to have a social life to have the knowledge of the contents of one’s mind and the knowledge of other people’s mind as well. Thus Davidson’s externalist view is based on the triangulation view of mind where a person’s own mind, mind of others and the social environment are taken together.

2.4 Davidson’s Compatibilists Position

Being an externalist’s Davidson has deeply contributed to the idea of externalism which has its roots in Putnam and Burge works on the philosophy of mind. Contrary to the internalism, Davidson’s externalist’s position holds that the mind is not self-contained. It means that the mind does not exist independent of the world. Davidson’s externalist’s position is quite different from other traditional kinds of externalism, like those proposed by Putnam and Burge, since it can be considered as an attempt to combine both causal and social externalism as well as upholding first-person authority within an externalist framework. According to Davidson the mere history of causal relations between the subject and the outside world is not at all sufficient to determine

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.,p.37.

¹⁰¹ Davidson, 1991: 202.

the content of the propositional attitudes. The “second person”¹⁰² (as Davidson labels it), is also necessary and represents the social element that he wants to introduce in his own kind of externalism. The role of the “second creature” is precisely the social element that Davidson is looking for and it constitutes one of the distinctive marks of triangular externalism.

Now before moving forward to Davidson externalism it is important to understand that the notion triangulation was introduced by Davidson in “Rational animals”—

If I were bolted to the earth, I would have no way of determining the distance from me of many objects. I would only know they were on some line drawn from me towards them. I might interact successfully with objects, but I could have no way of giving content to the question where they were. Not being bolted down, I am free to triangulate. Our sense of objectivity is the consequence of another sort of triangulation, one that requires two creatures. Each interacts with an object, but what gives each the concept of the way things are objectively is the base line formed between the creatures by language.¹⁰³

This brief passage conceals all of the basic elements of the theory of triangulation. According to Davidson in order to have any thought there must be at least two creatures, a speaker and an interpreter, linguistically interacting with each other in the world. Later on the theory of triangulation became the central notion of Davidson’s philosophy. The basic idea of triangular externalism is that in order to have the knowledge of the mental content, or to have thoughts we should have basic interaction between the speaker, interpreter and the outside shared world. One important point that Davidson realizes is that the mere connection of the subject and the world is not at all sufficient to determine the content of the propositional attitudes. Thus Davidson added the very important third element i.e. the interpreter.

Now, one can question—if a speaker has the authority over the content of his mind then how the interpreter interprets the mental content of a speaker? Davidson answers this question by saying that what one’s words mean cannot be determined in isolation from one’s causal history.¹⁰⁴ Davidson suggests that one’s causal history is one’s own and an interpreter interprets the words

¹⁰² Davidson, 1992:107-122.

¹⁰³ Davidson , 2001:105.

¹⁰⁴ A history involves regular use of the words in an environment which connects us with objects external to our body.

of the speaker by that history. For Davidson, first-person authority with respect to one's own knowledge of what one's words mean arises from the fact that each person is the subject of his or her own causal history.¹⁰⁵

According to Davidson, the speaker can be wrong about his own psychological self-ascriptions; this is the reason why first-person authority is not infallible for Davidson. And since there can be a situation where both the speaker and the interpreter would be wrong about a person's psychological states, this possibility of error does not eliminate the asymmetry between first person and the third person knowledge of the mental contents, as the intentional states of the subject are inferred by others. On the other hand, the subject is authoritative about the contents of his own mental states. For Davidson the knowledge about the empirical objects is possible with the help of the subject or the speaker but a single creature is not sufficient to identify the cause of the external world. In order to know the relevant cause among all the possible causes, it is essential to have an interpreter. Davidson claims that there can be no mind without the individual, the community and the physical world.

The teacher is responding to two things: the external situation and the responses of the learner. The learner is responding to two things: the external situation and the responses of the teacher. All these relations are causal. Thus the essential triangle is formed which makes communication about shared objects and events possible. But it is also this triangle that determines the content of the learner's words and thoughts when these become complex enough to deserve the term.¹⁰⁶

Davidson claims that these three factors (the individual, the community and the physical world) are the conditions for the emergence of thought. The reason to have an interpreter is that in order to know the relevant cause there must be something common between both the speaker and the interpreter, as it must be situated in the shared world. It is important to note that according to Davidson, the relevant cause may be successfully identified only in a linguistic framework, that is to say that only language can solve once and for all the determination of the relevant cause and thus thought and language are deeply intertwined from the very beginning.¹⁰⁷To put it

¹⁰⁵ Davidson, 2000: 15- 37.

¹⁰⁶ Davidson, 2001: 203.

¹⁰⁷ Davidson, 1999a:130.

differently, Davidson suggests that our linguistic life is the very proof of the idea of triangulation. Once we interpret and are interpreted, that is, as long as we ascribe beliefs and meanings mutually to each other, the fundamental connection between ourselves, the community and the world have already been established.

Davidson insists on the fact that the distinctive aspect of his concept of triangulation is the introduction of the community. For Davidson one single creature is not able to find out the right external cause that constitutes the objective content of her mental states, there must be another creature whose perceptual reactions and concept forming abilities are innately similar to those of the subject, so that she can pick out the right cause, which is actually the external common cause. Thus for Davidson such objective content can be determined only by the mutual interaction of two creatures sharing the similar environment. The role of the second subject or the interpreter is the social element that Davidson introduces in his account of meaning and mental content.

I would introduce the social factor in a way that connects it directly with perceptual externalism, thus locating the role of society within the causal nexus that includes the interplay between persons and the rest of nature.¹⁰⁸

Davidson claims that the mental content of a person's mind should be objective rather than subjective. It means that the truth or falsity of the mental content should be independent of the speaker. Davidson suggests that the objective knowledge about the mind can be true and can also be turn out to be false. On this point, Davidson follows Wittgenstein's idea that one would not have the concept of error if one would not be in interaction with other creatures of similar type. The process of triangulation is based on the similar concept, the process of triangulation involve two creatures with the backdrop of a public shared world.

Triangular externalism can be said to be quite different form externalism from other kinds of externalism. It can be said to be a combination of physical as well as the social externalism where the outside world as well as the social environment of a person plays a very essential role in determining the content of one's own mind. One very important point about Davidson externalist's position is that the presence of an interpreter is necessary to identify the relevant

¹⁰⁸ Davidson, 2001: 201.

cause for determining the mental content. Davidson claims that without triangulation, words and concepts lack content. On the other hand without concepts there could be no proper triangulation.

For Davidson, linguistic communication requires that speaker and hearer share something in order that they understand each other. That which is shared is typically thought to be linguistic conventions or some kind of rules. However, for Davidson neither conventions nor rules seem necessary for understanding. Davidson replaced conventions by intentions and triangulation in his account of meaning and communication.¹⁰⁹ He suggests that understanding only require sharing the world in which interpretation takes place.

Davidson held that in order to communicate, the speaker must intentionally make himself /herself interpretable to a hearer. If a speaker wants to be understood by her hearer, she cannot mean whatever she wants by the words she uses, but she must use language in a way that makes it possible to interpret. This is a consequence of the requirement of learnability and interpretability; that is, of making oneself understood.¹¹⁰ She does that by providing the clues required to arrive at the correct interpretation of her utterance.¹¹¹ The basic connection between words and things is established by causal interaction between people and the world, and this connection constrains interpretation. Generally the task of the translator is aided by prior linguistic knowledge. Speaker if they want to be understood cannot mean whatever they want by the words they use, but must use language in a way it is used.

The hearer's assignment of truth conditions to the sentence that the speaker utters proceeds by the process of radical interpretation.¹¹² Radical interpretation occurs when the speaker is interpreting utterances by simultaneously delivering a theory of belief and a theory of meaning for which conclusive evidence is not possible.

Radical interpretation is involved in all cases of linguistic understanding, whether it concerns a speaker of the same natural language as the interpreter, a speaker of some unknown language or

¹⁰⁹ Davidson, 2001:13.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.28.

¹¹² Davidson, 2001b:5-20.

the learner of the first language.¹¹³ Interpretation is indeterminate, because “alternative ways of stating the facts remain open.”¹¹⁴ To put it in Davidson’s words---

Because there are many different but equally acceptable ways of interpreting an agent, we may say, if we please, that interpreting or translation is indeterminate, or that there is no fact of the matter as to what someone means by his or her words.¹¹⁵

Radical interpretation is a matter of interpreting the linguistic behavior of the speaker’s utterances. The basic problem that radical interpretation must address is that one cannot assign meanings to a speaker’s utterances without knowing what the speaker believes, while one cannot identify beliefs without knowing what the speaker’s utterances mean. It seems that we must provide both the theory of belief and a theory of meaning at one and the same time. Davidson claims that the way to achieve this is through the application of the so-called ‘Principle of Charity.’¹¹⁶

In Davidson’s work this Principle which admits of various formulations and cannot be rendered in any precise form; often appear in agreement between the speaker and the interpreter.¹¹⁷ In fact the Principle of Charity can be seen as combining two notions: a holistic assumption of rationality in belief (Coherence) and an assumption of causal relatedness between beliefs—especially perceptual beliefs and the object of belief (correspondence).¹¹⁸

The Principle of Coherence prompts the interpreter to take the speaker to be responding to the same features of the world that he (the interpreter) would be responding to under similar circumstances. For Davidson successful interpretation involves the basic rationality. Davidson claims that if we assume that the speaker’s beliefs are in agreement with our own, then we can use our own beliefs about the world as a guide to the speaker’s beliefs. For example: when a speaker with whom we are engaged use a certain sequence of sounds as utterances about say ‘cow’ or about some particular ‘cow’; we can as a preliminary hypothesis interpret those sounds or utterances about ‘cow’ or about some particular ‘cow.’ Once we have arrived at the

¹¹³ Davidson, 1973: 314- 28.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.173.

¹¹⁵ Davidson, 1991a: 161.

¹¹⁶ Davidson, 2001a: 92.

¹¹⁷ Davidson, 1973: 314-28.

¹¹⁸ Davidson, 1991: 205-220.

preliminary assignment of meanings, we can test our assignment against further linguistic behavior. Using our developing theory of meaning we are then able to test the initial attributions of beliefs that were generated through the application of Charity. This enables us to further adjust our assignments of meaning, which enables further adjustment in the attribution of beliefs...and so the process continues until some sort of equilibrium is reached. However if there is no way an interpreter can match the speaker's utterances with objects in the world, we are not entitled to say that the uttered sounds belong to a language.

As Davidson claims that—

There is a presumption that the speaker knows what she means, that is, is getting her own language right, there would be nothing for an interpreter to interpret.¹¹⁹

Davidson's point of argue is that first-person authority, the social character of language, and the external determinants of thought and meaning go naturally together, once we give up the myth of the subjective, the idea that thoughts require mental objects.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Davidson, 2001:38.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.35.

Chapter 3

Davidson on Myth of the Subjective

Introduction

As per our discussion in the previous chapters, it is clear that for Cartesians, a split exists between the human mind and the rest of the world. The primary evidence for this split comes from the common sense observation that each of us possesses a unique place in the world occupied by no one else: I have my mind; you have yours. This can be said to be subjective view on the nature of mind and the mental. According to this view, the subject or the 'I' is something completely distinct from the objective world, that the world is "out there" waiting to be discovered. There can therefore be mainly two standpoints of viewing the world, the subjective and the objective. In the philosophy of mind, the subject is the bearer of the phenomenal flow of consciousness, and the physical or behavioral details are the stuff of 'objective' empirical study. This distinction between the subject of experience and the object that is experienced, or the distinction between the subjective point of view as opposed to the objective point of view has been widely accepted by philosophers belonging to different traditions. In this final chapter of the dissertation, I will consider Davidson's attack on this dichotomy in his article "The Myth of the Subjective". The rejection of this dichotomy has an important ramification on his idea of the first-person perspective and self-knowledge, which will also be highlighted in this chapter.

3.1 Traditional Ways of Knowing the Mind

The dichotomy between the subject and the object is one of the debatable topics in the philosophy of mind. Subjective thinking can be understood as the category that belongs to the mental domain. It is also considered to be a part of the inner domain of our mind. On the other hand objective is something that belongs to the physical world, a world that is "out there" to be discovered by the human mind. Generally it is considered to be domain of scientific enquiry where its nature is independent of how we as subjects think about it. According to the traditional picture of the world there is a difference between the subjective world and objective world, where the subjective excludes the objective and *vice versa*.

Cartesianism accepts the subjective view of the mind, according to which the mental states are independent of the external world. For them there is a special method of knowing the content of the mind and that is why individuals are said to have privileged access to the content of mind. For a Cartesian, that is someone who accepts the formulation of a subjective as “in here” and an objective as “out there”, the subject can know the object through a discrete conceptual scheme. Knowledge according to these philosophers is a relationship between the knower (subject), the known (object) and the various modes of knowing.

As discussed in the first chapter, the Cartesian idea of a split between mind and the world has given rise to an internalist account of the mind. Internalists accept the view that a conceptual scheme or internal realm of the mental states such as beliefs, desires, intention etc. are internally given to the subject and are to be individuated solely by factors internal to the subject. However, when we accept that a separation exists between the subject and the object then the question that can be posed to Cartesian idea is that—how we come to know anything about the external world that exist apart from the subject? Descartes answer this question by presenting a representational account of reality. He holds a belief that the subjects have concepts in the mind that represents the reality “out there” in the external world.

The main aim of Davidson in his article “The Myth of the Subjective” is to answer philosophers who believe that the world can be distinguished from the subjective point of view as something absolutely different from it. The main aim of this article is to question the subjective-objective dichotomy, or more fundamentally the dualism between the mind and the world or the inner and the outer. Those who make the distinction between the subjective and the objective think that by making this distinction they are able to provide a secure foundation to knowledge in the subject. The subjective domain as insulated from the external world is the domain of certainty. Furthermore these philosophers also hold that there is something immediately present before our mind, and the mind is a passive receptor of those presentations. All these ideas are brought under scrutiny by Davidson in his article.

Empiricism has been one of the most important philosophical positions in the history of epistemology. From Aristotle to Quine, the idea that experience plays a central role in the grasping the world view has been widely accepted. Even non- empiricist philosophers like Kant have felt the need to accept experience as an external constraint for our thoughts. Empiricism as

a philosophical position claims that all our knowledge is derived from experience. However, in recent years empiricism has received an important criticism from the work of Donald Davidson. Davidson does not said much about experience in his writings and said even less about the non-conceptual experience. Davidson never denies that we ever experience anything rather denied the role of experience as the source of knowledge and maintained a view that only a belief can play a role of justifying another belief. So, the main aim of Davidson is to show that there is no object, like a sense-data before our mind, and also that empirical knowledge does not and need not have an epistemological foundation.

According to Empiricist, through experience we perceive things in the world in an immediate manner. All our empirical knowledge is grounded in how we see, hear, touch, smell and taste the world around us. Perception is the central issue in epistemology. Perception is the process by which we acquire information about the world around us using our five sense organs. However there is a distinction between the perception that involves concepts and that does not. Let us understand this position with the help of an example, while looking out of the window we see that it is raining. My perception represents the world as it is. To perceive the world as it is means that you pose the concepts (empirical concepts) to the external world. This representational view has been accepted by Descartes; it is the way of representing and thinking about the world. This example shows that the perceiving being possess the concept 'rain'. To perceive that 'it is raining' it must be true that 'it is raining'.¹²¹ Our thoughts, utterances and ascriptions are taken by many philosophers to have content in virtue of being representations of reality. Such representations can be accurate or inaccurate: that are accurate are said to be true, that is they correspond to the facts or to the reality. For philosophers like Kant, Sellars and McDowell, perceptual experience involves interplay between sensory and conceptual capacities. The question as to what is the nature of perceptual experience can be understood properly if we compare the classic position of David Hume and Immanuel Kant. Let us now understand the role of experience in Hume's philosophy.

Traditionally we can say that the central to Hume's position is his notion of perception, they are the mental items of which we are aware. Hume distinguished between perceptions which

¹²¹ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/epi-per/>

correspond to thought – ideas and those which correspond to experience and emotions—impressions.¹²² He also draws a distinction between simple and complex perceptions, complex perceptions are those which can be broken down into other perceptions which make them up, and simple perceptions are those which cannot be broken down any further. Hume holds a view that all our knowledge is derived from experience; this is what defines him as an empiricist. The point to be noted is that for Hume, simple impressions are given to the senses and are those from which all our other impressions and ideas are either directly or indirectly derived. So, these simple impressions are our uninterpreted data of experience which are beyond doubt.

However Kant realized that knowledge cannot solely derived from experience of the above kind nor can be solely derived from reason. Kant came up with a solution by synthesizing both reason as well as experience. He suggested that reality must be structured simply by examining our own rational apparatus. He claimed that all our knowledge is both synthetic and apriori. Such propositions are central to how we experience and think about the world, by developing an understanding of what it means for a proposition to be both synthetic and apriori and explaining how such propositions are possible.

Kant's influence on modern philosophy can hardly be overstated. In order to clarify the significance of his claim that our perceptual and rational means of knowledge plays a role in constituting the form of our experience, Kant draws a distinction between 'phenomena'—things as we experience them and 'noumena'—things as they are in-themselves, independent of the human minds.¹²³ The key feature of Kant's thought is his metaphysical dualism. Kant distinguished phenomenal appearances from noumenal reality, that is, things-in-themselves. The phenomenal is the consciously experienced world and the noumenal is the world independent of how it is experienced. Since the noumenal is beyond experience, only the phenomenal can be known, and therefore, metaphysical speculation about the noumenal is pointless. To put it differently, Kant claimed that noumena are the root cause of all phenomena, and yet we can only know the phenomenal world, since that is the reality as it is presented to us by experience. Kant suggested that it is impossible to understand the world as it is in-itself, independently of how we

¹²² Hume, 1739: 1.8.

¹²³ Kant, 1929: 180-191.

think about it because of this there is no reason to think that our representations of reality are really 'like' reality as it is in-itself.

The consequence of this is that the true nature of reality is unknowable to us. It could be argued that this opens the door to a type of conceptual relativism (in Davidson's sense), since it may be possible for there to be minds which are radically different to our own. So there can be a situation when every human being interprets the world differently. This would mean that radically different synthetic apriori principles would be true for their experience of reality.

One way of putting this would be by saying that such a mind would have a different phenomenal world from our own. The noumenal world, which is the root cause of all phenomena for all minds is the same, but because their experiences are shaped in radically different ways, then the world as they experience it would also be radically different. This would mean that many sentences in our language such as—"There is a chair in the next room" would have no translation in other language, since lacking an understanding in space, they would have no understanding of what it means for something to be 'a chair' or 'next'. In addition to this, it is also likely that it would be very difficult, for them to understand what we mean by words like 'room', since an essential part of our understanding of them is that they are necessarily located in space.

So by considering the possibility of minds which structure experience in different ways, and for which different synthetic apriori propositions are true, we have all the aspects of the conceptual relativism which Davidson attacks. To put it in Davidson's words—

Minds are many, nature is one. Each of us has his own position in the world,
and hence his own perspective on it.¹²⁴

Around the turn of the twentieth century, philosophy turned away from metaphysical speculation. Early analytic philosophers rejected the Kantian dualism by identifying the noumenal with the phenomenal. However, by denying a distinct noumenal world, analytic philosophy explicitly focused their attention to phenomenal reality. The phenomenal is conceptual, that is, phenomenal experience as they are. For instance, experience of cows as cows, water as water etc.

¹²⁴ Davidson, 2001: 39.

However Davidson rejected this idea of representation of reality and in turn rejected the subjective proposal. Now, one can question Davidson—if subjectivity is something that should be avoided then how does Davidson justify his view on first-person authority? Davidson answers this question by rejecting the following view of the mind derived from philosophers like Hume—

‘the mind is a theatre in which the conscious self watches a passing show...The show consists of...what is given in experience.’¹²⁵

Davidson believes that the main reason why philosophers hold a view that, accepting the first-person authority leads to a form of subjectivity that excludes the objective world altogether is due to what Davidson claims to be an extremely faulty picture of the mind. This faulty picture of the mind is the picture that Davidson portrays in the above quote. We cannot take our mind to be passively receiving inputs from the external world without any contribution from its own side. In this regard Davidson can be said to have been influenced Kant, though he would categorically reject the noumenal world. Davidson further claims that philosophers usually accept the traditional representational view of mind. The representational view of the mental holds that the subject comes to know the representational form of the objects. According to the subjectivist, utterance meaning can be accounted for entirely in terms of speaker meaning. What a speaker’s words mean is just the meaning that the speaker has in mind. Davidson rejects this position by observing that it leads to the impossibility of healthy communication. According to him, the subjective proposal is unacceptable as it makes communication impossible. While rejecting the subjective idea of the world Davidson puts forth his own idea about both the mind and the world. Davidson attempts to solve the problem of the external world by rejecting any priority of the subjective over the objective. For Davidson, three varieties of knowledge come together namely—knowledge of the self, knowledge of the other minds and of the external world.

There is an abundance of puzzles about sensation and perception; but these puzzles are not, as I said, foundational for epistemology. The question of what is directly experienced in sensation, and how this is related to judgments of perception, while as hard to answer as it ever was, can no longer be assumed to be a central question for the theory of knowledge. The reason has already been given: although sensation plays a crucial role in the causal process that connects

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.34.

beliefs with the world, it is a mistake to think it plays an epistemological role in determining the contents of those beliefs. In accepting this conclusion, we abandon the key dogma of traditional empiricism, what I have called the third dogma of empiricism...I am suggesting that empirical knowledge has no epistemological foundation, and needs none.¹²⁶

Despite the epistemologically coordinate status of the mind and the world, the content of the mind can be shown to entail how it is out in the world. To put it differently, Davidson argues that we could not possibly have the beliefs with their contents, unless the world around us is in the way we take it to be.

Davidson's work is mainly devoted to two projects, one epistemological project and the other metaphysical project. The epistemological project was to articulate and defend an account of human knowledge that is opposed to "empiricism" (the view that the subjective is the foundation of the objective empirical knowledge).¹²⁷ The metaphysical project was to show that participation in a certain complex interaction involving another creature and a shared environment—Davidson calls this interaction "triangulation" which has been discussed in detail in the second chapter.

Davidson has attempted to address some epistemological issues. The main question that he tried to answer is-- how knowledge is possible? Although this is one of the traditional philosophical concern, but Davidson's approach is not traditional one. One thing that is distinctive of the traditional approach is that the traditional account of knowledge addresses the problem of each kind of knowledge separately. For instance, some philosophers are largely concern with the question how our knowledge of the external world is possible, while others are mainly concerned with the question about our knowledge of other minds, yet others are concerned with how we have self-knowledge. Davidson tried to give answers to all these questions by taking all the three kinds of knowledge together. He claims that we will not be able to solve the problem of knowledge unless all the three kinds of knowledge are taken together.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.46.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.46.

Davidson tried to answer the problem about knowledge by stating that all the different kinds of knowledge must hang together. For him it is not possible to reduce one kind of knowledge to any other. After rejecting the independence of each kind of knowledge, Davidson explains how they must hang together. He represents our knowledge as a triangle, with each angle essentially dependent upon the other two angles. He insisted that no one kind of knowledge is reducible to any other kind. Davidson claims that the line that connects one's own mind with other minds is the line of communication between persons. In the previous chapter, I have discussed Davidson's view with regard to its metaphysical issue; this chapter is mainly based on the epistemological project that Davidson undertakes.

Next section is dedicated to Davidson's rejection of conceptual relativism. One may say that a consequence of abandoning the traditional dichotomy between the subjective and the objective, the inner and the outer, is an adherence to a form of conceptual relativism. Davidson, in the article under discussion, very closely states how and why he distances himself from conceptual relativists.

3.2 Davidson's Attack on Conceptual Relativism

Now let us expound briefly Davidson's reason for rejecting empiricism. His main criticism of empiricism is present in his article "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." The conclusion of this article is that we lack criteria for distinguishing between conceptual schemes and therefore we lack the criterion for their identity as well. And if we lack a criterion to identify schemes, we lack as well a criterion to distinguish between a conceptual scheme and its content. The main target of Davidson's article is conceptual relativism, it is an idea according to which there are different conceptual schemes that organize or fit experience differently. In the paper "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" Davidson argues that we cannot make sense of the claim that there could be conceptual schemes which are different from our own. He argues that conceptual schemes different to our own must be untranslatable into our own language and further believed that the idea of untranslatable languages does not make sense.

Conceptual relativism is the claim that we do not have direct understanding of reality itself, but that our view of the world is mediated by a conceptual scheme. It seems reasonable to claim that different cultures and different intelligent species could have radically different relationships

with the world, and because of this they would conceptualize and even experience the world radically differently from how we do.

Davidson's main reason for criticizing conceptual relativism is that, it results into different conceptual schemes and as a result will lead to untranslatability of language. The most important point of Davidson's analysis is that he does not conclude from his rejection of conceptual relativism that there is just a conceptual scheme nor does he accepted conceptual monism. His conclusion is not that all men possess the same conceptual scheme because—

“if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one.”¹²⁸

Davidson claims that as we cannot intelligibly say that there are different conceptual schemes, we must provide criteria to identify both conceptual schemes and their content in order to defend that all humans share an identical conceptual scheme. In the absence of those criteria the distinction between a conceptual scheme and its content is just dogmatic and the view that empiricism is grounded on the distinction between the scheme and content cannot be accepted. As Davidson puts it--

Minds are many, nature is one. Each of us has his own position in the world, and hence his own perspective on it. It is easy to slide from this truism to some confused notion of conceptual relativism. The former, harmless, relativism is just the familiar relativism of position in space and time. Because each of us preempts a volume of space-time, two of us cannot be in exactly the same place at the same time. The relations among our positions are intelligible because we can locate each person in a single, common world, and a shared time frame. Conceptual relativism may seem similar, but the analogy is hard to carry out. For what is the common reference point, or system of coordinates, to which each scheme is relative? Without a good answer to this question, the claim that each of us in some sense inhabits his own world loses its intelligibility.¹²⁹

The point that Davidson is trying emphasize is that to think of the world from the subjective point of view is highly unintelligible as different individuals will interpret the world in his/her

¹²⁸ Davidson, 1974: 198.

¹²⁹ Davidson, 2001: 39.

own way. Davidson further claims that if we accept conceptual relativism in this subjective form then the language associated with the conceptual schemes will mean different things and will be beyond rational interpretation. Thus Davidson rejects the idea of conceptual relativism. Though he accepts the view that there are differences in our understanding, but it is not the case that these differences are beyond the reach of human intellect altogether. Davidson claims--

The meaninglessness of the idea of conceptual scheme forever beyond our grasp is due not to our ability to understand such a scheme, nor to our other human limitations; it is due simply to what we mean by a system of concepts.¹³⁰

The idea that Davidson is trying to put forth is that if we accept conceptual relativism then the idea would be that different schemes or languages constitute different ways in which what is given in experience may be organized.¹³¹ However, according to Davidson there could not be any common point of judging these conceptual schemes, and that is unacceptable.

Further Davidson goes on to suggest that in order to reject representation we must reject facts. And if there are no representations, there is no sense for conceptual relativism. To put it in Davidson's word—

Beliefs are true or false, but they represent nothing. It is good to be rid of representations, and with them the correspondence theory of truth, for it is thinking that there are representations that engenders thoughts of relativism.¹³²

The idea here is that relativism is encouraged by the idea that a viable distinction can be made between representations and things represented, this distinction is supposed to be untenable according to Davidson.

Davidson claims that there is no clear distinction between 'seeing that p' and 'believing that p'; more specifically he holds that experience is ambiguous-- either it is a sensation or it is a belief. According to him there cannot be an epistemological intermediacy between sensation and belief.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 40.

¹³¹ Ibid., 41.

¹³² Ibid., 46.

Seeing or otherwise sensing things often cause us to have true belief about them. In such standard cases of perception there is no epistemic intermediary: I look and I believe. When what I am caused to believe is true, I have perceived that something is the case which is the cause. It is because the meanings of many of the sentences I use to report such occasions were ostensibly learned that I am normally justified in forming the beliefs; it is this externalist feature of perceptual beliefs that tends to make them self-certifying.¹³³

Davidson in his famous work “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” as well as in his work “The Myth of the Subjective” holds a view that the intelligibility of relativism presupposes a dualism of ‘conceptual scheme’ and ‘empirical content’.¹³⁴ His central argument against conceptual relativism is the rejection of the scheme-content distinction and the representational theories of truth.

Davidson suggests that we lack criteria for distinguishing between alternative conceptual schemes and therefore we lack criteria for their identity as well. And if we lack criteria to identify schemes, we lack as well as a criterion to distinguish between a conceptual scheme and its content. From a common sense point of view, it is believed that minds are many and nature is one. Each human being perceives the world in his own subjective way, this results into the subjective position with respect to the world. According to Davidson, this subjective interpretation of the world results into the confused notion of conceptual relativism.

The idea of conceptual schemes is typically understood by drawing a distinction between the conceptual scheme and the scheme content. It is important here to understand the difference between the word scheme and the word content. The scheme may be thought of as an ideology, a set of concepts suited to the task of organizing experience into objects, events, states, and complexes of such; or the scheme may be a language.¹³⁵ Whereas the content of the scheme may be objects of a special sort, such as sense data, percepts, impressions, sensations, or appearances.¹³⁶ Thus the scheme content is shared by all speakers, but according to conceptual relativism, different speech communities could use different conceptual schemes to shape their

¹³³ Davidson, 2003: 695.

¹³⁴ Davidson, 1984: 183-98.

¹³⁵ Davidson, 2001: 41.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

experience of the content. This means that members of different schemes will experience the world differently and even truth can vary from scheme to scheme. As Davidson states—

Reality itself is relative to a scheme; what counts as real in one system may not in another.¹³⁷

Thus, one can say that the very first way to get rid of subjectivity is to reject the representational view or to reject the view that there are objects present before the mind in the outside world. As Davidson claims, the aim of his proposal

‘is to get rid of the metaphor of objects before the mind.’¹³⁸

Further Davidson claims—

The basic difficulty is simple: if to have a thought is to have an object before the mind, and the identity of the object determines what the thought is, then it must always be possible to be mistaken about what one is thinking. For unless one knows everything about the object, there will always be senses in which one does not know what object it is. Many attempts have been made to find a relation between a person and an object...There are no such objects, public or private, abstract or concrete.¹³⁹

Davidson claims that we can associate having a conceptual scheme with having a language. He claims—

There is a strong relation between conceptual schemes and language; we can “[associate] having a language with having a conceptual scheme.”¹⁴⁰

Davidson suggests that it is possible for two different languages to share a conceptual scheme and according to him two languages belong to the same scheme, if one can be translated in terms of the other. Davidson further claims that it is impossible to translate between the languages of different schemes. The point that Davidson wants to emphasize is that, if two people speak same language then they must be using the same conceptual scheme. On the other hand Davidson

¹³⁷ Davidson, 1974: 183.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.47

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁴⁰ Davidson, 1974 : 184.

claims that if there are two languages which cannot be translated into each other, then this means that they belong to distinct conceptual schemes.

The general idea of Davidson's argument against the relativist conceptual scheme is that we cannot make sense of the idea of a language which we are unable to translate into our own, and so we are unable to make sense of the idea that there could be conceptual schemes different from our own. If there was a community which appeared to use a different conceptual scheme from us (since they use the language that cannot be translated into our own) then we would not be justified in claiming that they are speaking a language, or using a conceptual scheme at all, since we cannot make sense of their speech behavior.

Davidson claims that the nature of correct interpretation guarantees that we are firmly in touch with the reality. One very important point to keep in mind is that Davidson never claims that our beliefs are the representations of reality rather he criticizes the representational way of knowing the reality (as already discussed in the previous section). Davidson suggests that many of our simplest beliefs are causally related to our environment and are true. This does not imply that all of our beliefs must be true; mistaken beliefs may sometimes be provoked by misleading sensations. Davidson holds a view that any particular beliefs may be false, but the basic framework of plain beliefs we hold about the world and our place in it cannot be mistaken. To put it in Davidson words—

‘for it informs the rest of our beliefs, whether they be true or false, and makes them intelligible.’¹⁴¹

Davidson finds the basis for objectivity in intersubjectivity, that is, in the relation between creatures reacting simultaneously to each other and stimuli from a shared world. In fact he finds a middle ground between absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity. The objectivity of any particular belief or judgment can be understood only in terms of the agreement between different people within a community. As Davidson states that—

Beliefs, intention, and the other propositional attitudes are all social in that they are states a creature cannot be in without having the concept of intersubjective

¹⁴¹ Davidson, 1991: 160.

truth, and this is a concept one cannot have without sharing, and knowing that one shares, a world, and a way of thinking about the world, with someone else.¹⁴²

Thus one can say that Davidson's view is anti-representationalist as well as a non-dualist. In fact one can say that dualism in philosophy of mind has led to representationalism, and by rejecting a form of dualism, Davidson also rejects representationalism. Davidson does accept the world as "out there" and does not doubt that most things in the world are causally independent of us. What he denies is that they are representationally independent of us; he insists that the world contains no 'truths' or 'facts' prior to language, waiting to be discovered. For an object to be representationally independent of us it would need to have certain intrinsic features, so that it would be more adequately described or represented by certain of our terms or conceptual schemes than by others. A representationally independent object would have a way that its own point of view. Many philosophers recognize that we have no way to distinguish the supposedly intrinsic features of an object from the merely extrinsic or descriptive features. Anti-representationalist like Davidson and Rorty respond to this fact by discarding "the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction, the claim that beliefs represent, and the whole question of representation independence or dependence."¹⁴³

Davidson recognized that: "the truth of an utterance depends on just two things: what the words as spoken mean, and how the world is arranged."¹⁴⁴ This fact that what a person's words mean depends upon the kind of objects or events that have caused the person to apply the words in a particular context and what a person's thoughts are about depends upon the external world. Thus according to Davidson there is no way to distinguish between the role of words and the role of the world in determining the truth of a statement. Thus one can summarize Davidson's intersubjective view by saying that our beliefs must be true, in touch with the objective reality, and shared with others. And the content of this simple belief is given by its causal relation to the environment, which provides the context that informs and makes intelligible our other beliefs.

Thus we can summarize Davidson main points about the contents of the mind--

¹⁴² Davidson, 2001: 121.

¹⁴³ Rorty, 1994b: 86.

¹⁴⁴ Davidson, 1986: 309.

- (1) Davidson claims that the states of mind like doubts, beliefs and desires are identified in part by the social and historical context in which they are acquired.
- (2) The states of mind or what is meant by the speaker, are identified by causal relations with the external objects and as a result leads to healthy communication between persons, keeping the importance of first-person authority
- (3) Davidson suggests that the distinction between the scheme and content is a mistake and should be avoided.
- (4) For Davidson what remains in place of subjectivity are the thoughts, and thoughts according to Davidson are private, in the sense that it belongs to one person.¹⁴⁵

As already discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the main aim of Davidson for the rejection of subjectivity is that it restricts the possibility of healthy communication. However Davidson does not deny the existence of inner states for him human beings have inner states. Though Davidson rejected the representational view of knowledge as well as the reliance on experience as the only source of knowledge but does not rejects the foundations of empirical knowledge and the first-person authority. Davidson further claims that there are inner states of mind and these states of mind includes the thoughts of the speaker and these thoughts are identified by a causal relation with the external world which results into communication. In order to maintain the position of first-person authority, Davidson emphasized that it is true that there are certain thoughts that are private. To put it in Davidson's words—

Thoughts are private, in the obvious but important sense in which property can be private, that is, belongs to one person. And knowledge of thoughts is asymmetrical, in that the person who has a thought generally knows he has it in a way in which others cannot.¹⁴⁶

To strengthen Davidson's first-person authority claim, in the end of the article "The Myth of The Subjective", Davidson states that there can be certain thoughts that are private to the speaker in the sense that they cannot be known to others. With the aim of strengthening Davidson's position on rejecting the subjectivity of thought, my upcoming section is dedicated to Wittgenstein's

¹⁴⁵ Davidson, 2001: 52.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

private language argument. Just as Davidson points out the impossibility of communication of subjective experience, in the same way Wittgenstein in his famous book *Philosophical Investigations* rejected the possibility of private language and has been one of the main influence in Davidson's philosophy.

3.3 The Wittgensteinian Legacy in Davidson

As we have already discussed Davidson's view on subjectivity, in order to strengthen Davidson's position I would like to give a brief explanation of Wittgenstein's rejection of private language argument. Wittgenstein's private language argument is a direct attack on the idea of the subjective. The point that both Davidson as well as Wittgenstein puts forth is that if we accept that the subject has something intrinsic inner experience, then the only way of expressing these subjective experience is in terms of a private language. However Wittgenstein in his famous book *Philosophical Investigations* holds a view that the private language is something unacceptable.

Wittgenstein first raises the idea of a private language in part one of his famous work *Philosophical Investigations*, he says—

But could we also imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences—his feelings, moods and the rest—for his private use? Well, can't we do so in our ordinary words of this language? But that is not what I mean. The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be know the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.¹⁴⁷

However, the main aim of Wittgenstein was to show that private language is impossible, and that even if it were possible, it would be completely useless.

Wittgenstein suggests that for communication to be possible, it is essential to share certain attitudes towards the things around us. This point can be understood more clearly with the help of an example: to say that 'this is a red pen', there should be an agreement between the speaker

¹⁴⁷ Wittgenstein:1958, §243.

and the hearer on what do being colored and being red mean. According to Wittgenstein, regular use of such concepts and agreement in their application is the part of language and it is these uses in the intersubjective communicative situations that give meaning to the words in our language. For communication to be possible there should be some similarity of forms, concepts and rules in a language which are neither privately given nor privately entertained.

Our use of sensation word like ‘pain’ seems to be contexts where this kind of use theory of meaning fail, since these sensations are considered as subjective, inner and private to the person who is expressing it. Hence, one can say that the only way of referring to these private sensations is through a private language which is available only to the experience. The idea of private language was made famous in Wittgenstein’s famous book *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein states that—

The words of this language are to refer to what can be known only to the speaker; to his immediate, private, sensations. So another cannot understand the language.¹⁴⁸

However the point to remember is that Wittgenstein does not refer to personal codes while talking about private language rather Wittgenstein had in mind is a language conceived necessarily comprehensible only to its single originator, because the things which defines its vocabulary are necessarily inaccessible to others.

Wittgenstein claimed that we cannot think of a language with different rules, different concepts and different logic. Language for him involves rules establishing certain public/social linguistic practices. Just like the rules of grammar express the fact that it is our practice to say ‘May I come in’ instead of saying ‘Come in May’. The point that Wittgenstein is trying to puts forth is that agreement is essential in such practices and this agreement depends upon ‘the form of life’ that the speaker of a language inhabits.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., §242-315.

Wittgenstein therefore denied any possibility of private language. While he uses an expression in another context, that is, to name a language that refers to private sensations. According to him such private language cannot be understood by anyone other than its user who alone knows the sensations to which it refers to. Wittgenstein in his private language argument claims that it is impossible for an individual to create and maintain meaningfulness in relation to a language they had created privately, because there is no objective way of checking the similarity of meaning between their uses. Wittgenstein's position on private language can be understood by referring to the passage 243 in the following way--

“...could we also imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experience...for his private use?”¹⁴⁹

He goes on to say further in the same passage—

“The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to be person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.”¹⁵⁰

After introducing a remark on private language in passage 243, in 256, Wittgenstein questions what it mean to associate a sign with a sensation? How does their association take place? How does the association of a name with a sensation lead to that name actually meaning the sensation? In passage 257 Wittgenstein claims that the private definition of words lacks the ‘stage-setting’ necessary for language to be meaningful. To put it in Wittgenstein's words—

When one says ‘he gave the name to his sensation’ one forgets that a great deal of stage setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense. And when we speak of someone's having given a name to ‘pain’, what is presupposed is the existence of grammar of the word ‘pain’; it shews the post where the new word is stationed.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., §243.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., §257.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., §257.

What Wittgenstein is trying to say here is that in order for a word to name an object or sensation—in order for any word to mean anything—there has to be some system of rules? He further questions whether any such system of rules could exist in the private language. This line of thought appears again in passage 261 where Wittgenstein shows that it is really difficult to talk of a private sign S.

Wittgenstein claims that this notion of private language is highly unacceptable. He tried to put forth his position with the help of the following example—

Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign “S” and write this “S” in a calendar for everyday on which I have the sensation. I will remark first of all that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated. But still I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition. How? Can I point to the sensation? Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation—and so, as it were, point to it inwardly... Then did the man who made the entry in the calendar make a note of nothing whatever? For a note has a function, and this “S” so far has none.¹⁵²

Wittgenstein further goes on to say that—

What reason have we for calling “S” the sign for a sensation? For “sensation” is a word of our common language not for one intelligent to me alone. So, the use of this word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands. And it would not help either to say that it need not be a sensation; that when he writes “S”, he has something and that is all that can be said... But such a sound is an expression only as it occurs in a particular language-game, which should now be described.¹⁵³

The point that Wittgenstein wants to present is that the so-called ‘private language’ is no language at all.

¹⁵² Ibid., §258.

¹⁵³ Ibid., §261.

Wittgenstein attempts to demonstrate that the words/sign of a private language cannot be defined in any meaningful way. He remarks that ‘a definition of the sign cannot be formulated’: a private language sign cannot be defined using any words the speaker already knows, as this would make it part of public language.

Wittgenstein in the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations* makes an analogy between the various uses of tools in a toolbox and the various uses of words in a language, he continues the analogy in connection with our tendency to think that “every word in a language signifies something--”

Imagine someone’s saying: “All tools serve to modify something. Thus the hammer modifies the position of the nail, like saw the shape of the board, and so on.”—And what is modified by the rule, the nails?—“Our knowledge of a things length, the temperature of the glue and the solidity of the box.”—would anything be gained by this assimilation of the expressions?¹⁵⁴

Thus Wittgenstein claims that meaning of each word in a sentence can be understood through its use. This theory is known as use theory of meaning. Now, Wittgenstein has been questioned—if meaning of a word in a language can be understood through its use then how we will understand the meaning of various sensations, such as the sensation of ‘pain’ etc.? The point to be noted is that Wittgenstein does not deny the existence of sensations or experiences such as pains, tickles, itches etc. In order to answer this question, Wittgenstein claims that—

Words like ‘pain’, are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. “A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations, and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain- behavior.”¹⁵⁵

According to this view, to say “I have a pain in my foot” is to do something akin to holding one’s foot and moaning. A moan is not true or false—the moaner is not reporting or describing

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., §105.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., §288.

anything. Moaning is a natural expression of pain, just as blushing is a natural expression of embarrassment.

However, Wittgenstein is not denying reality to psychological phenomenon. But the fact that we can understand psychological phenomena purely in terms of having a private inner life separated from the intersubjective world that we inhabit is being questioned by him. With the help of this thought experiment Wittgenstein tried to emphasize the impossibility of a private language. The experiment goes like this—

Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a “beetle”. No one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. But suppose the word “beetle” had a use in these people’s language? If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as something: for the box might even be empty. That is to say: if we continue the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of ‘object and designation’ the object droops out of consideration as irrelevant.¹⁵⁶

Thus Wittgenstein argues that if we talk about something, then it is not private, in the sense considered. And, if we consider something to be private, it follows that we cannot talk about it. Now, the point that Wittgenstein wants to put forth is that if one wants to take our sensations, feelings and thoughts seriously one should not approach them as being objects in an inner private domain.¹⁵⁷ For Wittgenstein not all parts of the language functions in the same way. Thus according to Wittgenstein to say—“I am in pain” is not used as a report or a person’s mental state rather it is a way of expressing one’s psychological ascriptions. Hence no one can judge to be true or false, as it is a way of expressing oneself to others.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., §293.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., §293.

With the help of the beetle-in-the-box experiment, Wittgenstein suggests that public words that refer to inner sensations do not get their meaning from the sensations themselves. All these words tell us is that there is a sensation, not what the sensation is. For Wittgenstein, linguistic meaning is the use of words, and as mentioned above, the use of the word 'pain' is to express rather than to describe the sensation. The point that Wittgenstein is trying to make is that the word 'pain' is an expression of the sensation rather than a description of it, it is not a description of pain behavior either: 'the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it.'¹⁵⁸

In the passage from 246-51, Wittgenstein concludes that sensations are private, and that this is an apriori proposition—that it logically could not be any other way.¹⁵⁹ Wittgenstein claims that the word 'pain' cannot refer directly to the sensation because only I could know what the sensation is: if the word did refer to the sensation, the word would mean nothing to anyone but me.

Thus one can say that the theory of expressivism promises to dissolve the problem of self-knowledge. According to the expressivists account, we are misled by grammar into thinking that 'I am in pain', actually 'I am in pain' is not typically used to report or state something rather it is a way of expressing one's mental states. According to the expressivists like Wittgenstein, paraphrase of 'I am in pain', would be 'ow!' If a person step on your foot and you shout 'ow!', you are not asserting that you are in a certain psychological condition and thus cannot be said to be true or false.

Wittgenstein accepts that mental states and their expression are not connected by the interpretation of an inner event, that is, that the expression of such knowledge is a rule-governed practice founded on public criteria. Thus, we cannot think someone who is crying in pain can be misinterpreting his own mental states or pretending to be in pain. Wittgenstein claims that the natural expression of pain is crying as it is not an activity. Wittgenstein warns that the idea that a cry expresses pain in the same way as a proposition expresses thought.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., §244.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., §248.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., §317.

From this brief discussion of Wittgenstein's argument against private language, we see that even Wittgenstein denied subjective understanding of meaning and mental content. Though our mental life is private and therefore we have a first-person authority *visa vis* our mental life, it is nonetheless connected with the world that we inhabit and the language we use. Thoughts cannot be separated from language and the world that we inhabit. Davidson may not fully accept Wittgenstein's expressivist account of self-knowledge, he was greatly influenced by Wittgenstein's insights concerning mind and meaning in *Philosophical Investigations*. That is why Davidson says—first-person authority, the social character of language, and the external determinants of thought and meaning go naturally together, once we give up the myth of the subjective, the idea that thoughts require mental objects.¹⁶¹In order to have these three factors together, we have to give up the subject/object dichotomy and representational account of mind and meaning.

¹⁶¹ Davidson, 2001: 35.

CONCLUSION

Donald Davidson has been one of the most important philosophers in the twentieth century who has contributed to the debate centering around the nature of self-knowledge. His ideas in each philosophical field of thought, especially in philosophy of language, epistemology and philosophy of mind are so tightly entrenched that it becomes difficult to isolate an argument from one field to the argument from the others. That is why his view on self-knowledge becomes so very unique and one of the most remarkable traits about his philosophy is the close connection he found between language and mind. And that connection can be noticed in the domain of our enquiry.

Realizing the significance of Davidson's philosophy and his contribution in philosophy of mind and philosophy of language, my aim in the first chapter of the present thesis is to explore the views of those philosophers whose views on self-knowledge have influences and to whose views Davidson has responded. As already discussed, self-knowledge is the knowledge about one's own mental states such as desires, beliefs, fears etc. Broadly speaking, there are mainly two answers with regard to the question of self-knowledge. First view is regarded as the observational model of knowing our own minds presented by Descartes. Second view is the inferential view presented by Ryle. The views presented by Descartes and Ryle on self-knowledge can be said to be a cognitivist account of self-knowledge. This cognitivist approach is based on an assumption that self-knowledge is a cognitive achievement where we gather new information about our own mental states either through observation or through inference. Unlike the cognitivist approach to self-knowledge, Davidson adheres to the non-cognitivist view of self-knowledge. For Davidson, our self-knowledge is based on presumption and cannot be said to be an achievement.

According to the traditional Cartesian view of knowing our own minds, there is a special method of knowing our psychological self-ascriptions. This special method of knowing the mental contents is known as introspection. Descartes claims that we have direct, infallible and transparent access to the contents of our own minds. This Cartesian notion of self-knowledge has been challenged by many contemporary philosophers and one such philosopher is Ryle. Contrary

to Descartes observational view of knowing our own minds, Ryle adheres to inferential or non-observational view about self-knowledge.

In Davidson's view, both the introspective paradigm of Descartes and the inferential paradigm of Ryle have come under attack. Unlike the observational approach of Descartes and non-observational approach of Ryle, Davidson presented an alternative view about self-knowledge. Davidson claims that knowledge of our own mental contents is based on the first-person authority. And the nature of this first-person authority has been discussed at length in this dissertation.

In the second chapter of my dissertation, my aim is to deal with Davidson's project of how we come to know our own mental states. The project of Davidson aims to show that participation in a certain complex interaction involves another creature and a shared environment and Davidson calls it triangulation. Further I explore Davidson's externalist position and I attempt to answer the challenged posed to the first-person authority view from an externalist account of the mind. As already discussed, Davidson's view on first-person authority is based on a presumption. According to this presumptive view of knowing our own minds, the hearer presumes that whatever the speaker is uttering is true, as the speaker is authoritative with respect to his views about his mental contents. For Davidson, this presumption about the mental contents is not based on evidence, thus according to Davidson, there is no epistemic ground to show the authoritative nature of the subject. Thus one can clearly say that Davidson presented a first-person authority view of knowing our own minds and also accepts that the subject has privileged access to his/her own mental contents.

My aim in the second chapter is to answer the question—if we accept first-person authority then how meaning of our mental content is determined externally? The strong position represented by Davidson is known as externalist position. This externalist position is opposed to the internalist position of Descartes. Internalist is the idea that an individual thoughts depends upon nothing but the resources that are present to the inner domain of our mind. Unlike internalist, externalist holds a view that mental contents are derived from and individuated by the external environment be it social or natural.

Unlike the externalist positions of Putnam and Burge, Davidson attempts to combine both causal and social externalism as well as upholds first-person authority within an externalist framework. Davidson's externalist position is known as triangular externalism. For Davidson in order to have any thought there must be at least two creatures, a speaker and an interpreter, linguistically interacting with each other in the world. Davidson claims that the mere connection between the subject and the world, in fact, is not at all sufficient to determine the objective content of his/her propositional attitudes. Thus, a third element, the interpreter, is also necessary. According to Davidson's view, one single creature is not able to find out which is the right external cause that constitutes the objective content of his/ her mental states, since there must be at least another creature whose perceptual reactions and concept forming abilities innately substantially similar to those of the subject. Thus as the objective content is necessary to form any propositional attitude and such objective content can be determined only by the mutual interaction of two creatures sharing similar responses to a common external world. This whole enterprise is impossible unless we take each other to be authoritative about what he believed, desires, hopes etc. Therefore, we can say that Davidson's externalist position is compatible with self-knowledge.

In the third chapter my intent is to focus on the epistemological project of Davidson. This project aims to defend an account of self-knowledge that is opposed to empiricism. The second attack on the Cartesian understanding of introspective account of self-knowledge comes from the rejection of the representational theory of meaning. Davidson questioned the subjective-objective dichotomy and claimed that this kind of dichotomy arises only when we accept a representational account of mind and meaning, an account which accept the existence of object before the mind. In the third chapter of my dissertation I aim to answer the question—if subjectivity is something unacceptable by Davidson then how does he justify his view on first-person authority? In the famous article "The Myth of the Given", Davidson rejected the traditional representational form of the objects. According to the subjectivists, meaning can be accounted for entirely in terms of speaker's meaning that is, the meaning that the speaker has before the mind. Davidson rejects the subjective account of meaning and claims that it results into the impossibility of healthy communication. Keeping Davidson's epistemological project in mind, my aim was to answer the question about the possibility of knowledge. For Davidson, knowledge of our own minds, knowledge of the minds of others and knowledge of the external world should go together.

One point that we should keep in mind is that Davidson's rejection of the representational account of knowledge is not an adherence to a form of conceptual relativism. Davidson's main reason for criticizing conceptual relativism is that it results into different conceptual schemes and as a result will lead to untranslatability of language. Though Davidson accepts the view that there are differences in our understanding but these differences are not beyond the reach of human intellect altogether. While rejecting the subjectivity, Davidson finds the basis for objectivity in inter-subjectivity, that is, in the relation between creatures reacting simultaneously to each other and stimuli from a shared world. In fact Davidson finds a middle ground between absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity.

With the aim of strengthening Davidson's position about first-person authority and his rejection of the subjective view, the last section of the third chapter deals with Wittgenstein's private language argument. According to Wittgenstein, if we accept the view that the subject has something intrinsic or inner experience then the only way of articulating subjective experiences in language is in terms of a private language, a language that is available only to the speaker. For Wittgenstein, private language is something highly unacceptable because it restricts the possibility of communication goes against his very idea that meaning of an expression consists in its use. Wittgenstein claims that if we accepts something as private, it follows that we cannot talk about it but we do talk about our sensations. Thus for Wittgenstein, sensations cannot be said to be private. Further Wittgenstein claims that various sensations like the sensation of pain, sensation of pleasure etc. can be expressed in language hence cannot be private. For Wittgenstein when we have different sensations and for instance when I say 'I am in pain' this sentence is not to report anything rather it is a way of expressing ourselves to others.

Therefore one can say that there is a similarity between Davidson's view as well as Wittgenstein's view of self-knowledge. Though Davidson does not fully accepts Wittgenstein's expressivist view of self-knowledge but the commonality between the views of Davidson and Wittgenstein lies in the fact that both of them discarded the subjective means of meaning and a purely subjective view of mind.

Based on the entire discussion on Davidson's view of self-knowledge, one can briefly summarize Davidson's strong philosophical position with the help of the following points—

- (1) Contrary to the traditional observational and inferential account of self-knowledge, Davidson accepts the first-person authority view of knowing our own minds. According to the first-person authority view, we assume that the subject is authoritative about his/her psychological ascriptions. And the interpreter will always believe that whatever the subject is uttering is true. Unless we grant the speaker this form of authority with regard to his/her own mental states, communication in terms of interpretation becomes impossible.
- (2) Davidson adheres to the triangulation externalist position with regard to self-knowledge. According to Davidson the mere history of causal relations between the subject and the outside world is not at all sufficient to determine the content of the propositional attitudes. The basic idea of triangular externalism is that in order to have the knowledge of the mental content, or to have thoughts we should have basic interaction between the speaker, interpreter and the outside shared world. For him there is a mere connection between the speaker, the hearer and the interpreter. Interpreter assumes that whatever the speaker is speaking is correct. Davidson further claims that in order to communicate, the speaker must intentionally make himself /herself interpretable to a hearer. If a speaker wants to be understood by his/her hearer, he/she cannot mean whatever she wants by the words she uses, but she must use language in a way that makes it possible to interpret. This is a consequence of the requirement of learnability and interpretability, that is, of making oneself understood.
- (3) Davidson deals with the question of epistemology in a commendable way by taking all the three forms of knowledge together. According to Davidson, knowledge of our own minds, knowledge of the external world and the knowledge of the minds of others should be taken together. None of the knowledge is complete without the other.
- (4) Davidson's acceptance of first-person authority does not imply that he also accepts a subjective/objective dichotomy. By rejecting the subjective as well as the objective view of meaning and mind, Davidson adheres to intersubjective

view of mind and meaning. According to this view there is a relation between creatures reacting simultaneously with each other and in a shared world they inhabit. However according to Davidson, rejecting the subjectivity/objectivity dichotomy does not imply a rejection of subjectivity altogether. We may end our discussion here by quoting Davidson on what remains of the concept of subjectivity in his philosophy. He says—

“two features of the subjective as classically conceived remain in place. Thoughts are private, in the obvious but important sense in which property can be private, that is, belongs to one person. And knowledge of thoughts is asymmetrical, in that the person who has a thought generally knows he has it in a way in which others cannot.”¹⁶²

¹⁶² Davidson, 2001: 52.

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