

# PRIVATE LANGUAGE-A CRITICAL STUDY



By

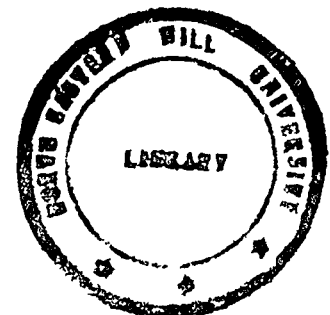
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PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

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This is to certify that the  
dissertation entitled "PRIVATE LANGUAGE -  
A CRITICAL STUDY", submitted by Shri Kalipada  
Mohanta <sup>in</sup> ~~for the~~ partial fulfilment of the <sup>requirements for the</sup>  
degree of Master of Philosophy is a bonafide  
study to the best of our knowledge. All the  
quotations, extracts and ideas of other studies  
have been duly referred.

This dissertation may be sent to the  
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## INTRODUCTION

The problem of the privacy of the mind and the related problem of the possibility or otherwise of a private language have been the subject of much debate in recent philosophy. The problem was posed in a very striking manner by Wittgenstein in his Philosophical Investigations. But what Wittgenstein did was to make explicit what was already implicit in an entire tradition of philosophy. This is the tradition in which states of the mind were regarded as inalienably private entities directly accessible only to the owner of such states. And both what has been called Cartesianism and Empiricism belong to this tradition.

In the first chapter of the present work I have tried to show how different philosophical undercurrents belonging to the tradition referred to above give rise to an idea of privacy which leads to the thesis of solipsism and the corresponding idea of the impossibility of linguistic communication between persons. In this connection, I discuss and relate the views of classical

empiricism (Locke, Berkeley and Hume) and modern so called logical empiricism as also the views of Descartes.

In the second chapter, as the title suggests I concern myself with philosophical problems relating to the idea of self-knowledge. Although there is a wide divergence of views about the self and our knowledge of the self in the philosophical tradition I mentioned, there is none the less a basic similarity of approach which leads to the idea that knowledge of the self, if there is any such knowledge, is peculiarly private. Here I make use of the distinction made by Kant between empirical self and transcendental self to counter this idea of the privacy of self-knowledge.

In the third chapter I argue that an empiricist approach to the problem of language and meaning has inevitably lead to the considerable mistake of psychologizing logic. This latter has been primarily responsible for much of the confusion in the debate about the above problems.

I also suggest, after Wittgenstein, that the correct philosophical elucidation of the concept of meaning cannot be in terms of "images", "simple ideas" and such others, but must be in terms primarily of the use of language.

The concepts of "private", "private language" and "private experience" are further discussed in chapter four. The purpose of this is to clearly specify the cluster of concepts around which the controversy about private language revolves.

In conclusion I consider what I take to be Wittgenstein's major argument against the possibility of private language. In my opinion this argument has been generally misunderstood by commentators as well as detractors of Wittgenstein. I try to present the argument in a form which is not open to many usual objections, and in this form the argument is strikingly similar to many things that Kant has said in his critique of Pure Reason.

CHAPTER - I  
SOLIPSISM AND PRIVACY

'Solipsism' and 'privacy' are the logical outcome of both classical and logical empiricism on the one hand, and 'mind-body' dualism of Descartes on the other. I will argue out in this chapter how this thesis is justified.

The epistemology of Locke is essentially a shift in emphasis from what one knows to how one knows, for Locke considered that an investigation into the origin, nature and extent of knowledge must invariably precede the quest for reality. He starts with his polemics against the innateness-thesis of knowledge. It is argued that the thesis, that some ideas are innate is not only false but also logically untenable. If universality be the mark of innateness then there can hardly be any idea or principle which is found everywhere and in every individual. Moreover, even if some principles as those of mathematics, etc. are universal that does not account for their innateness. This clearly paves the way for the empiricist thesis that knowledge is a posteriori. Mind, at birth, is a tabula rasa and all knowledge, whatsoever, are only later acquisitions made possible

by sense object contact. Being a realist,  
 Locke advocates a two-world theory, viz., the  
 world of objects and the world of mind. Locke  
 recognizes three elements in the knowledge  
 situation, viz., the object, the mind and its  
 ideas. The ideas are nothing but the consequences  
 or the results of the mind's contact with the  
 stimuli external or internal.

In Locke's philosophical work, we find  
 very frequent use of the term "idea". So one  
 must be very clear about the meaning of this  
 term. Locke, in the very beginning of the Essay,  
 defines it in the following way :

*It being that term which, I think,  
 serves best to stand for whatsoever  
 is the object of the understanding  
 when a man thinks, I have used it to  
 express whatever is meant by phantasam,  
 notion, species or whatever it is  
 which the mind can be employed about  
 in the thinking; and I could not avoid  
 frequently using it. I presume it  
 will be easily granted me that there  
 are such ideas in mens' minds; every-  
 one is conscious of them in himself,  
 and mens' words and actions will  
 satisfy him that they are in others.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human  
 Understanding, Vol.I, p.9.

Thus for Locke "ideas" are the object of understanding. "Thinking" is used widely to cover all possible cognitive activities. He expressly includes within the connotation of the term what have later been called sense-data, memories, images and abstract concepts.

So the meaning of "idea" in Locke's work is not clear. Many things are included within it. Even sense-data, memories, images, concepts, and abstract ideas fall under this head. But these notions are different from each other, and it is very confusing to put them under one head. For example, memories and images are mental entities. In a sense concepts are mental constructions. But the Lockean simple idea is not a mental construction in the sense a concept or an image is. It enters into the mind from 'without'. To lump them together under one head looks like treating mental entities as non-mental and vice versa. A simple idea, for instance, is defined as whatever is 'given' or 'directly present' in perception; they are the object of sensing, of 'direct' or 'immediate' or 'actual' awareness in perception.

It seems, Locke does not maintain these distinctions and he uses the term 'idea' to cover all these notions.

An important part of the Lockean doctrine of ideas is that an idea is the intermediary between the knowing mind and the object known. When one perceives an object, the perception is nothing but an idea which represents the object. So in terms of ideas and ideas alone one gets the knowledge of the physical world. Although one's knowledge is confined only to ideas, Locke still believes in the independent existence of things which are the source of these ideas. He distinguishes between two types of qualities that things have, viz., (a) primary qualities and (b) secondary qualities. Primary qualities are there with the object itself, and secondary qualities are mere powers to produce certain sensations. Let us take an example of the ideas of qualities which go to make up our complex idea of a 'mango': we find some of the qualities which are there in the mango itself in the sense that the mango cannot be conceived of without them,

viz., the mango is solid and extended. But there are qualities like taste, colour, smell, etc., which may or may not belong to the mango itself. And Locke holds the view that ideas of primary qualities are exact representation of these qualities but those of secondary qualities are not so.

Another curious thesis of Locke's is that the qualities of a thing need a substratum to subsist it; and that this substratum is necessarily unknown and unknowable.

But Berkeley considers the above position of Locke's unsound and directs his polemics against Locke. According to him, if ideas are all that mind knows or has access to, then there is no reason as to why one should suppose that there must be a reality over and above the realm of ideas. If ideas are the representations of the objects, the knowledge of objects means the knowledge of representations only. And in that case the knowledge of an object is a piece of unwarranted inference from the idea of it. So all that mind knows/ is not really the object but only ideas and from

this the reality of the object is postulated as causing such representations. Berkeley argues that if the ideas are all that the mind has access to, the postulation of an unknown substance remains logically unsound and unwarranted. To exist is to exist as an idea or a group of ideas. In other words, the statement about an object can be translated into the statement about ideas. To exist is to be perceived as an idea. To be, / is to be perceived. Thus the existence of reality is mind dependent. The refutation of the two-world theory leads Berkeley to maintain the inevitable idealistic thesis (esse-est-percipi). So for Berkeley, ideas and the mind are the only realities. The reasons which prevent him from accepting any extramental realities are precisely the ones which also ought to be prevented him from accepting the reality of other minds. The Berkeleyan position can only result in an eventual acceptance of one's own mind and one's own ideas as the only realities.

The subjective idealism or the solipsism of Berkeley has enormous implications. If one's

ideas are the only realities one cannot have any knowledge of other minds. Knowing becomes a subjective phenomenon and knowledge becomes something personal and private'. This can be detailed out in the following manner.

Being a staunch supporter of Lockean empiricism, Berkeley also believes that knowledge begins with experience, in other words, mind has acquaintance only with its experiences. This is what led Berkeley to assert the fact that physical objects are nothing other than experiences. There is no unknowable part left out in the object, because an object is all that we see or perceive. For example, a 'chalk' is nothing but the conglomeration of some ideas like smoothness, whiteness, solidity etc. which we perceive.

But if Berkeley really believes that our knowledge is restricted to only our experiences, then the knowledge of other minds become immediately questionable; because one can observe another's body, but one cannot observe his thoughts, feelings, and sense-experiences. So how can one be sure that

another's body is connected with a mind like his own, if knowledge is confined to experience only. Thus for a Berkeley one's own mind and its experiences are the only realities, and it has no way out of solipsism.

If ideas, meanings and concepts are merely mental contents peculiar to the individual and unique of their kind then the language by which they are sought to be expressed is bound to be private. And this is but a logical consequence of Berkelean analysis of knowledge. Let me explain how privacy of language follows from the solipsism of Berkeley.

Language, after all, is a "carrier" of ideas. In every act of communication there is a content or 'what' to be communicated and 'that' or the medium which communicates. The purpose of language is to communicate the ideas, feelings, etc.. It is inter-subjective, but since the ideas or the feelings under the above hypothesis remains significant only ? to the person concerned however perfect the communicating medium may be, it would not make sense

to the hearer. For understanding a language implies a capacity to relate the symbol with the symbolized, since the symbolized here are by their very nature personal and private, the symbols would be, for the hearer, nothing more than certain vocal articulations or some written marks. Thus, necessary privacy of language is the natural outcome of Berkeley's thesis.

Hume, who carried empiricism to its logical end, argues that if ideas are the only realities, there is no justification to uphold the substantiality of self and mind. This position of Hume can be stated in the following manner.

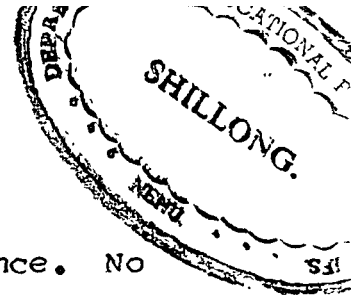
Hume agrees with the basic assumptions of empiricism and holds the same thesis that mind at birth is a tabula rasa, void of ideas and all that mind receives comes from experience only. But he does not agree with Locke's thesis that ideas are the only thing that mind perceives rather he divides the objects that the mind perceives into impressions and ideas as follows :

"The difference betwixt these consists in the degrees of force and liveliness with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness. Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning : such as, for instance, are all the perceptions excited by the present discourse, excepting only those which arise from the sight and touch, and excepting the immediate pleasure or uneasiness it may occasion."<sup>1</sup>

So impressions are the contents of mind in perception, and ideas are of imagination etc.. He further divided ideas into those of sense and those of reflection, and again into those which are simple and those which are complex. Like Berkeley, he denies the existence of anything beyond impressions and every simple idea is a copy of the corresponding impression. Knowledge or understanding can therefore refer to nothing other than these mental contents. Hume calls his method "experimental method": the necessity of referring, in all philosophical

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<sup>1</sup>David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, p.1.



problems, to the discoveries of experience. No justification can be given for belief in the self and extramental world. Reason cannot justify such beliefs, because all that are given are nothing but a bundle of impressions and ideas. Thus Hume's arguments can lead only to scepticism.

Although Hume argues that he does not believe in the existence of the self or mind, the logical awkwardness of his position is immediately apparent from what he says: "when I enter most intimately what I call my self, I always stumble on some particular perception or other."<sup>1</sup> Here the very use of 'I' refers to one subject, because perceptions without referring to one subject have no meaning. The analysis of Hume's position leads us to believe that in spite of his assertions to the contrary he must believe in the existence of a self and its impressions and ideas. His position then becomes similar to that of Berkeley and has no way out of solipsism. Thus British empiricism

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p.252.

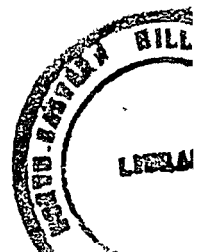
in any form what-so-ever, leads to solipsism and the essential privacy of the mind.

The latter-day logical positivist, of course, derived his primary inspiration from Hume. Logical positivists divided meaningful discourse into two groups, viz., (i) necessary propositions as found in logic and mathematics and (ii) empirical propositions as found in different factual sciences, and this was foreshadowed in Hume's distinction between 'relations of ideas' and 'matters of fact'. So far as the necessary propositions are concerned they pose no problem; problems arise with the empirical propositions. In order to justify the empirical basis of knowledge, positivists devised a principle known as the principle of verification. According to this principle, the meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification. A.J. Ayer expresses the same theme in his Language Truth and Logic, in a modified manner thus:

A sentence is factually significant to any given person, if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which it purports to express—that is, if he knows what observations would lead him, under certain conditions, to accept it as being true or reject as being false.

1A.J. Ayer, Language Truth and Logic, p.20.

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But even if one admits that is an adequate theory regarding meaning, from another point of view it is inadequate because it also inevitably leads to privacy and solipsism. The positivists relate verification to experience. Verification is to be made in terms of experience. But once verification is related to experience the following problems arise. The same proposition can be verified by different persons, and in this connection whose verification is to be regarded as sure and certain? There may be as many different results of verification, as there are different individuals. It opens up two possibilities: (i) If we accept that verification can be made by different individuals in their own ways then the results of verification may differ from case to case. This will lead to solipsism. (ii) If we accept that the results obtained by verification of different individuals are to be compared and contrasted, it may either lead to interminable dispute, for whose verifications is to be regarded as standard one?, and whose verification is to be

rejected? So positivistic position is in no way better than that of British empiricism because privacy and solipsism are inevitable in their thesis.

The theory of sense-data also leads to the idea of privacy and solipsism. Russell and others have argued that physical objects are nothing but logical constructions out of sense-data. According to them knowledge of the external world is constructed out of sense-data and we do not perceive the physical objects rather our perception is confined to sense-data only. Instead of saying we are directly acquainted with material objects, it is better to say, we are directly acquainted with sense-data, because "material things may present different appearances to different observers or to the same observer in different conditions."<sup>1</sup> For example if one puts a stick, half deep in water, due to refraction, the stick will appear crooked. But, in reality, it is not so. Moreover, the stick cannot be

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<sup>1</sup>A.J.Ayer, The Foundation of Empirical Knowledge, p.3.

both crooked and straight at the sametime. And it is for this purpose philosophers have taken recourse to the term 'sense-datum'. Thus Russell and others argue that whatever is given in our immediate experience is not material thing but sense-datum.

It can be said with Russell that when we perceive a table we perceive only the sense-data like brown colour, oblong shape, smoothness ~~and~~ etc., which we usually associate with the table. Russell speaks of two types of knowledge in this connection, viz., knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. And the latter depends upon the former kind of knowledge. Knowledge by acquaintance is that "with which we are directly aware, without the intermediary of any process of ~~inference~~ or any knowledge of truths."<sup>1</sup> Thus in the above example when somebody is present before a table he is directly acquainted with the sense-data, i.e., its colour, shape, hardness, smoothness, etc., which is known as knowledge by

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<sup>1</sup>Bertrand Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, p.25.

acquaintance. Thus all kinds of knowledge of the empirical world are reduced to sense-data knowledge.

The way, they have defined the phrase 'sense-datum' ultimately leads to solipsism and privacy. According to them a sense-datum is that which is given in our immediate acquaintance with the objects. And this immediate acquaintance is a subjective phenomenon and is private to each individual. To make it more clear we may quote W.T. Stace :

"I cannot experience", says Prof. Stace, anything except my own experience I can see my red but I can never see yours. I can feel a pain in my leg. But I can never feel the pain in your leg. I can feel my emotion but not yours. Even if your anger infects me, so that I feel it in sympathy with you, it is yet, in so far as I feel it, my anger, not yours. I can never be you, nor you me. I cannot see through your eyes, nor you through mine. Even if you can telepathically transfer a mental state, say an image, from your mind to mine, yet when I become aware of it, it is then my image and not yours. Even if, as some think, I can directly perceive your mind, without having to infer it from your body, still this perception of your mind will then be to me my perception, my experience."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>W.T. Stace, Theory of Knowledge and Existence, p.67.

This is not a case of physical incapacity, like my inability to see through a brick wall, or of a psychological incapacity, such as my inability to remember all the events of my childhood.<sup>1</sup> The barriers that prevents us from enjoying one another's experiences are not natural but logical. It is meaningless to attach meaning to the expressions like "I am experiencing your stomach pain," "Your state of anger is numerically the same as mine."

Thus our knowledge of the external world is confined to our sense-data only. This position of the sense-data theorists is no way different from that of the empiricists. So privacy and solipsism; follow from classical empiricism, logical empiricism of the positivists and the sense-data theory.

Descartes' theory of mind also leads to solipsism and privacy. His notion of God as the absolute substance, and mind and body as relative substances was of paramount importance, not only from the point of view of the originality of the thesis which evoked a storm of controversies but

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<sup>1</sup>A.J. Ayer, op.cit., p.138.

also it had far reaching consequences in the history of philosophy. Descartes conceives of body as essentially extended and mind as a thinking substance. In other words, one could neither think of an unthinking mind nor of an unextended body. As per the above postulation, body becomes something spatial, public, observable and workings of body therefore becomes something objective and phenomenal. But mind being something unextended is neither public nor observable. Since body is public the physical process and workings of body are public. And since mind is an unextended substance the mental process are private occurrences. Thus the thesis that mind is a private chamber and the mental processes are private processes, owe their origin to Descartes' definition of mind. It is a fact that by postulating mind as a thinking and unextended substance, Descartes makes a possible case for the thesis of privacy. So far as physical processes are concerned communication may be carried on without much difficulty. There is obviously no difficulty on the part of the hearer of the language in co-relating symbol with

the symbolized. For in this case both the symbol and the symbolized are equally objective and public. But while communicating one's feelings, ideas relating to the mental phenomena one would have to face an insuperable difficulty. Even if we have adequate symbols for expressing the mental phenomena yet we cannot do it successfully. The symbols can hardly make any sense to the hearer. The symbolized here remains meaningful only to the percipient. Thus the language will remain meaningful only to the user of it but not to the hearer. From the above discussion it follows that the mind-body dualism of Descartes also leads to privacy and solipsism.

So, empiricism, either classical or logical, on the one hand and Descartes' mind-body dualism on the other hand ultimately lead to privacy and solipsism. We will argue in detail in subsequent chapters how the empiricist approach to knowledge as a whole is defective. The empiricists made a serious mistake in defining knowledge in terms of sense experience only. We will also show later on that the concept of knowledge cannot be explicated in

terms of experience alone. Any attempt to define knowledge in terms of experience is bound to lead to solipsism and privacy.

CHAPTER - II  
SELF KNOWLEDGE - ITS CRITERION

The notion of the 'self' has been understood in widely divergent manners by different thinkers in the history of philosophy. Materialists reduce self to matter, but ~~I~~dealists and ~~A~~bsolutists find such an attempt ridiculous. They argue that 'self' is non-material. Some thinkers maintain it to be indivisible spiritual substance. There is another group of thinkers who are of the opinion that self is nothing but an aggregate of different mental states. Regarding the theories of 'self' I will not enter into detail. I will highlight in this chapter only the notion of 'self-knowledge' and 'its criterion' and also argue that 'self-knowledge' does not lead to the idea of inalienable privacy.

Before entering into the discussion proper let me make a brief sketch of the ways in which self has been explained.

Descartes treats the mind or self as a substance. Descartes in his Meditations makes the famous distinction between mind and body. Body is passive, subject to all mechanical laws, bereft of

thought, feeling and power of spontaneous action. In contrast to the extended body there stands a non-extended self, whose essence is thought. 'Thinking' includes all our mental activities. Self is that thing which is indivisible, unextended substance as opposed to one's body which is essentially extended. So Descartes regards 'self' as a thinking substance. He argues that it is absurd to talk of a self without thought and a body without extension. Thus unextended body or extended self is a contradiction in terms. Regarding the knowledge of the self, Descartes says that it is by a direct introspection into ourselves that we obtain self-knowledge. There is no external criterion for knowing the 'self'. In Descartes' epistemology, clear and distinct perception or conception is that criterion of any knowledge what-so-ever. And 'self' knowledge is possible for the simple reason that it can be conceived as a substance clearly and distinctly.

Locke thinks that the self is a soul-substance, and it is the substratum of our psychological states like thinking, feeling, willing, etc.

This self, he calls a spiritual substance which is radically distinct from corporeal substances like gold, silver, iron, stone, etc. Corporeal substances can be known by our sense perceptions, but spiritual substance like 'self' cannot be known in the same way.

Berkeley says on the other hand that all objects of human knowledge are 'ideas':<sup>f</sup>

...either ideas actually (1) imprinted on the senses, or else such as are (2) perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind, or lastly, ideas (3) formed by the help of memory and imagination.<sup>1</sup> But besides all that endless variety of ideas or objects of knowledge, there is likewise something which knows or perceives them, and exercises diverse operations, as willing, imagining, remembering about them. This perceiving, active being is what I call mind, spirit, soul or myself. By which words I do not denote anyone of my ideas, but a thing entirely distinct from them, wherein they exist, or, which is the samething, where by they are perceived; for the existence of an idea consists in its being perceived.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the existence of spirit after denying all power or agency to ideas he writes:<sup>f</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>George Berkeley, A New Theory of Vision & Other Writings, pp.113,114.

We perceive a continual succession of ideas ..... There is, therefore some cause of these ideas whereon they depend, and which produces or changes them ..... A spirit is one simple, undivided, active being: as it perceives ideas it is called the understanding, and it produces or otherwise operates about them, it is called the ~~will~~.<sup>1</sup>

Berkeley argues that ideas are sources of all knowledge. If he remains faithful to this position how can he at all posit an active unitary spirit? Berkeley, in order to get rid out of this defect used the concept 'notion' as giving us knowledge of the soul. Thus Berkeley instead of explaining what the self is, treats it as the cause of all mental states and processes.

Being aware of the defects of his predecessors Hume searched within to discover the self. He opens his Treatise with the words "All the perceptions of human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call Impressions and Ideas."<sup>2</sup> By perception Hume refers to any mental process. Moreover, since according to Hume,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp.125,126.

<sup>2</sup>David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, Book.I, part 1, p.I.

"all our simple ideas in their first appearance are derived from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, nothing of which we have no impression can be real. There is no impression of 'self' as there are of red, blue, sweet etc.. All that one can discover at any moment of his consciousness are certain perceptions like pleasure pain, sights, sounds, thought etc. But one cannot find the self of the philosopher. Hume says :

...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, 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.<sup>2</sup>

For Hume there is no self which is an entity which continues invariably the same throughout all

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., part I, p.4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., part IV, pp.251-252.

the manifold of mental states. Hume says, self is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement."<sup>1</sup>

In some of the religious traditions 'self' has been regarded as an ethereal or spiritual being. This self is completely different from the body or matter. It is the body which comes into existence and is destroyed in a particular period of time, but the self is eternal. It does not die and is not born. In this sense, 'self' and 'soul' are synonymously used. In most of the Puranas this view of self has been vigorously advocated. In the Bhagavat Gita soul or self has been regarded as an eternal spiritual substance. It is not born, it does not die, fire cannot destroy it, nor can sword cut it.

But I want to point out that this view of self is untenable. Self cannot be regarded as a

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., part IV, p.252.

spiritual and non-material substance. Can we even talk of such a substance? If the categories of thought such as space, time, causality, etc. cannot be applied in characterizing self then it will turn out to be unintelligible. Can we even say that such a self is neither in space nor in time? How do we locate such self? How do we identify and reidentify such self? All such questions remain unanswered, if self is regarded as a spiritual substance. To be, means to be in space and time. To exist means to exist in space and time. If such a view of self is not acceptable then the question of knowing the self in a special way may not arise at all. As a matter of fact we never ask such questions (except in a metaphorical sense or in a joke) as to whether someone has the knowledge of his own self. But this does not bar us from asking such questions. One may very well ask for a conceptual distinction between self-knowledge and knowledge of other things. In answer to this question we can say that we know the self in a way different from knowing other things. In case of the knowledge of the worldly objects, a distinction exists between the subject and the

object or the knower and the known. We can talk about the independent existence of worldly objects like, the chair exists, the book exists etc.. But in the same manner we cannot claim the existence of the 'self'. Again we can claim that we have the knowledge of the table, chair, books etc., but in the same breath we cannot claim the knowledge of the 'self'.

The very notion of consciousness presupposes the knowledge of the self. To obtain self-knowledge means to be self-conscious, self is known in and through itself as self-revealing consciousness. It is not known as standing external to, or referred to by anything. 'Consciousness' and 'self-knowledge' cannot be separated. Thus one does not have self-knowledge when one is unconscious. This is the limiting stage of self-knowledge. The limit here is not an empirical limit rather it is a logical one, like Kant's space and time which are the limits of experience. In case of empirical limits, if one does not follow, it hardly matters. For example - when one drives a motor vehicle 35 mph., in a residential zone,

surely he is crossing the speed limit, still then we do not accuse him, because it does not make much difference between the speed limit of that area which is 30 mph., and the existing driving speed. Thus in case of empirical limits the rules are very often arbitrary and loose. But in case of logical limit it will be self-contradictory if one violates it. So during the unconscious stage not only 'self-knowledge' is not possible but also we cannot simply talk about any other kind of objective knowledge.

The criterion of knowing 'self' is radically different from knowing other worldly objects. Whether somebody knows how to ride a motor cycle can be determined by a specific criterion. For example - when somebody claims that he knows how to drive a motor cycle, it entails, if a motor cycle has been given to him, he can handle it properly and can go from one place to another without falling down. Here the criterion of knowing is empirically satisfiable. But whether somebody has self-knowledge and self-consciousness cannot be determined by any specific criterion. To know the

self is not to achieve a special feat. In our life time we undergo different types of experiences, viz., thinking about a problem, or remembering some events seeing or hearing something or feeling some emotion such as jealousy, fear, anger etc.. Any one of the items of experience can be picked up and sorted out as an evidence or criterion of self-knowledge and self-consciousness. In this sense to have self-knowledge means to be conscious of something. If one is not conscious that is, one is non-conscious, one cannot have any knowledge at all. There is no occasion when we can say that we have knowledge of ourselves but we do not have the knowledge of any other things. Knowledge of other things includes and presupposes the knowledge of the self. The criterion/criteria of the knowledge of other things turns out to be criteria also of self-knowledge. The criterion of knowledge of other thing is bound to be public in nature, ipso facto the criterion of self-knowledge must be public.

'Self' cannot be known in the way we know the empirical objects, since it is not one among

the items of experience-like books, table, chair etc. One can be said to have come across an object, a piece of furniture, a motor cycle etc. But in the same sense one cannot be said to have come across his own self. Descartes and others were mistaken in assimilating the concept of 'self' to the concept of an 'object'.

The comments made above may become clearer in the light of the Kantian distinction between the empirical self and the transcendental self. In this connection we find a similarity between Kant in the West and Samkara in the East. Both of them make the same distinction in different languages. Empirical self and transcendental self are radically distinct from each other. The idea of empirical self or ego is that self to which our psychological states like feeling, willing, thinking etc. belong. It is a dynamic principle of unity as the governing factor of our mental life. But the idea of empirical self is insufficient to explain our knowledge and experience. So far as the psychological explanations are concerned, empirical self is sufficient to explain them. But knowledge and experience cannot

be explained by empirical self, since it leads to infinite regress. In knowledge situation there exists a dichotomy between knower and known or subject and object. Here 'self' is the subject which knows. But if one tried to know the 'self' then the subject itself becomes an object, thus one has to postulate another subject so that the object 'self' can be known, and the chain will go so on ad-infinitum.

Thus in order to get off these difficulties the idea of a 'Transcendental self' has been postulated. The idea of transcendental self is a logical necessity. It is only a logical postulate for the explanation of knowledge and experience. The logical postulate is different from mathematical postulates. Mathematical postulates are very often arbitrary, we can replace or can form new postulates according to our need. But the postulates regarding transcendental self cannot be arbitrary in the sense that it can be replaced by some other new postulates. The necessity of logical postulate i.e., transcendental self is such that without which one simply cannot talk about the explanation of

knowledge and experience. In mathematics, particularly in geometry we postulate certain theorems and deduce conclusions on the basis of these theorems. But the postulation of transcendental self is not like this. When one talks about the explanation of knowledge and experience automatically the notion of transcendental self is presupposed. It is not like; first we postulate transcendental self and then we talk about knowledge and experience. Thus without the postulation of transcendental self any talk of knowledge and experience will be meaningless.

The subject by which we know everything cannot itself be an object of knowledge. In this connection Kant and Samkara come very close to each other. Kant is right in saying that the transcendental self however is not an object of experience, rather it is a necessary condition of objective experience and so of the applicability of the categories. Kant says: /

We do not have any knowledge, whatsoever, of any such subject. Consciousness is, indeed, that alone which makes all representations to be thoughts, and in it, therefore, as the transcendental subject,

all our perceptions must be found, but beyond this logical meaning of the 'I', we have no knowledge of the subject itself which as substratum underlies this 'I' as it does all thoughts. The proposition, 'The Soul is substance', may, however quite well be allowed to stand, if only it be recognised that this concept does not carry us a single step further, and so cannot yield us any of the usual deductions of the pseudo-rational doctrine of the soul, as for instance, the everlasting duration of the human soul in all changes and even in death - if, that is to say, we recognise this concept signifies a substance only in idea, not in reality.<sup>1</sup>

Thus only in a conceptual or in a logical sense 'self' is transcendental and its knowledge is presupposed by all types of knowledge. Self-knowledge is the highest type of knowledge or primary knowledge only in this sense. Samkara also says that Atman-jnana (self-knowledge) is superior to other types of jnanas (knowledge). The method of knowing it, is also different. In ordinary knowledge situation there exists a distinction between subject and object. Both are distinct from each other, in the sense that both can be known separately or independently. But when one obtains the knowledge of the transcendental self the distinction

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<sup>1</sup>Critique of Pure Reason, Norman Kemp Smith Trans., p.334.



between subject and object does not exist. Both are merged into one pure consciousness.

Gilbert Ryle seems to reject the idea of transcendental self as a 'myth', as a 'shadow'. He argues that there is no such thing corresponding to the expression of 'I'. Proper names like Jack, Jill, Tom, etc., have got reference and these names indicate certain particular persons. But 'I' is a pronoun. It can name everybody. A proper noun denotes a particular person only. Thus the proper pronoun will also denote that thing, which is common among all the persons. Gilbert Ryle says that the present mode of analysis of the noun and proper pronoun is not only mistaken but also illogical. According to him 'I', 'you' etc., pronouns are not the names of any particular person or object nor the names of person as such or names of any common object. Month of January can be a name of a particular month, but the current month can never be a name of any particular month. So Gilbert Ryle's argument is that if one does not reflect on the behaviour of pronouns like 'I', 'you' etc., a superficial awareness could create

some arbitrary philosophical problems. Ryle even goes to the extent of saying that the notion of 'I' systematically eludes our grasp. His main contention is 'I' is an autorefering expression. It refers to the person who makes a statement or an assertion. But Ryle seems to have missed the point. We don't say that the concept of 'I' stands for an immaterial substance. But we simply point out that the idea of a transcendental 'I' is a logical necessity for the explanation of knowledge and experience.

Thus if self is regarded as a transcendental principle its knowledge can not be regarded as private. Self as a transcendental principle, we have argued out, is a logical necessity for explaining unity and coherence of knowledge and experience. Surely such a transcendental principle cannot be known either by inference or by perception. It is odd to say that we know a logical principle either by inference or by perception. We as persons have the knowledge of this principle but this is not self-knowledge. Self-knowledge means knowledge of the self by itself. If self

is regarded as a transcendental principle it is odd to say that the transcendental principle knows itself. In Advaita tradition of Indian philosophy it has been claimed that the self is the basis of all knowledge what-so-ever. All kinds of knowledge presuppose it but it cannot be known either by perception or by inference. In ordinary modes of knowing, a distinction exists between subject and object. But in case of a self-knowledge the distinction does not exist at all.

The enumeration of different ways in which the expression 'I' is used cannot solve the problem of the self. What is self?, How do we know self?, What is the nature of self-knowledge?, are all genuine problems. It is wrong to say that these problems are pseudo-problems. Ryle seems to maintain that these problems are pseudo ones. And once we know the different uses of the expression 'I' the problem vanishes. The concept of self cannot be completely exhausted by the different uses of the expression 'I'. The logical analysis of experience reveals that there must be an indubitable element behind all experiences. This

self lies behind all experiences but cannot be experienced. It is self-revealing only in this sense. It reveals everything else but cannot be revealed by anything else at all. This sort of self is regarded as witness consciousness (saksi-caitanya) in the Indian tradition. It makes all experiences possible but is not a part of any experience. A comparison can be drawn between our 'eyes' and the notion of 'I'. By means of our eyes we can observe things of the world, so it makes observation possible but one's own eyes cannot be the object of observation for himself. In the same way the notion of 'self' cannot be an object of experience, nor can it be a part of any experience.

The concept of the Kantian 'I' of the "I think" should be distinguished from the concept of a person as propounded by Strawson. The concept of person is an empirical concept. An empirical concept is that concept which has a counter part to it in the world. The concept of person is empirical because it has a counterpart in the world.

It is a matter-mind complex. One may agree with Strawson that the concept of material body and person are necessary for human communication, but one does not find sufficient reason to agree with Strawson that they are the primitive ones. A person, again is different from a piece of material body. A person is a psychophysical complex. How do we know the person? How do we know the psychophysical complex? Broadly speaking two types of question may arise in this connection. How does the person know himself?, and how do we know other persons? The first question poses no problem. Let us discuss the second question, that is, how do we know other persons? Robots can be designed in such a way so as to simulate the behaviours of persons. As a matter of fact, robots have been designed to perform certain actions performed by human persons. How do we distinguish a robot from a human person? What is the criterion? Take a hypothetical situation, where a robot performs exactly the similar sorts of actions as a human person could perform. Shall we treat this robot as a human person? To this question our answer is

yes. If a robot performs all types of activities, answers all types of questions, conducts himself like a human person, in all infinite possible ways, chooses, feels, decides etc., we would treat it as a human person. This may sound ludicrous but it is compelling on us. We do not say that a robot is a human person. As a matter of fact, even if a robot performs most of the actions performed by a human being yet we cannot treat him as a human person. But if a hypothetical situation is imagined where a robot performs exactly the same sorts of actions as can be performed by human beings then there is no choice before us except treating the robot as human person. Actually, the hypothetical situation puts the question as: Shall we call a human person as a human person? To know that something is a person means to distinguish it from material things and objects. How do we do this? By looking to certain sorts of behaviours. Something is a human person if and only if he exhibits or can exhibit a very wide sets of behaviours. In this sense only the concept of human person is much wider than the

concept of material body and other animals. Wittgenstein's remark "if a lion could talk, we could not understand him",<sup>1</sup> is very much suggestive. Why is it that we cannot understand a lion's speech? Wittgenstein does not say that as a matter of fact lions do not speak. Nor does he say that lions in future cannot speak at all. He is not making any empirical claim nor is refuting one. He is simply making us aware of the incompatibility of the concept of 'lion' and 'speech'. The concept of 'speaking' is intelligible only in a wider context. Talking and speaking are not isolated concepts. They are related to a great variety of concepts, which have application with reference to human persons.

There is another sense in which the term the knowledge of other persons can be used. In this sense it stands for the knowledge of attitudes, inclinations, personality, belief of other persons. These things about a person can be known not by

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<sup>1</sup>Philosophical Investigations, G.E.M. Anscombe trans., p.223.

inference, nor by having access to any inner chamber "if there is any" but by looking to their external behaviours. What I want to maintain in this connection is that the criterion of self knowledge, whether it is knowledge of the self by itself or it is knowledge of other selves by a particular self can never be private. It is bound to be public in nature. We have tried to show that self can never be regarded as something hidden behind the human body. We have shown that the criterion of self-knowledge can never be private.

CHAPTER - III  
LANGUAGE MEANING AND CRITERION

Part - I

The concept of meaning and the concept of language are logically connected. If language is a means of communication then meaningless language is perhaps a contradiction in terms. Meaningfulness and communicability are co-extensive if the idea of communicability is also related to the idea of understandability. In a ~~case of~~ speaker-hearer situation, the speaker is said to be successfully communicating something with the hearer if he is able to understand what the speaker says. In this chapter first of all I will try to show that the empiricist concept of meaning is rooted in private experience and the thesis of private experience ultimately makes the criterion of meaningfulness purely private. Secondly, I want to show that meaning cannot be linked to private experience and the criterion of right use and wrong use can never be private.

To a very large extent, human communication is carried on by means of language. Language consists of symbols, in other words, it can be said that language is a system of symbols. Regarding

language in general Locke says in his Essay:†

Man, therefore, had by nature his organs so fashioned as to be fit to frame articulate sounds, which we call words. But this was not enough to produce language, for parrots and several other birds will be taught to make articulate sounds distinct enough, which yet by no means are capable of language. Besides articulate sounds, therefore, it was further necessary that he should be able to use these sounds as signs of internal conceptions, and to make them stand as marks for the ideas within his own mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the thoughts of men's mind be conveyed from one to another.<sup>1</sup>

It follows from the above statement that three things are necessary for the meaningful employment of language, viz., "(i) one 'must be able to frame articulate sounds'; (ii) one 'must be able to use these sounds as marks of ideas'; (iii) one must be able, if necessary, to use words generally so that one word can 'mark multitude of particular existences.'"<sup>2</sup> So upholding the ideational theory of meaning, Locke says that the meaning of a word is the idea produced by that word in the minds of the speaker. Locke again

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<sup>1</sup>John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, vol.2, p.9.

<sup>2</sup>D.J.O'Conner, John Locke, p.9.

says about the words of our language and their references :

Thus we may conceive how words, which were by nature as well adopted to that purpose, came to be made use of by any man as the signs of their ideas; not by any natural connexion that there is between particular sounds and certain ideas, for then there would be but one language amongst all men; but by a voluntary imposition where by such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea. The use, then, of words is to be sensible marks of ideas, and the ideas they stand for are their proper and immediate signification.<sup>1</sup>

Thus a word does not resemble what it signifies. It is simply a conventional sign arbitrarily chosen by a voluntary imposition. The very fact that there are many languages proves their arbitrary character. Locke may be right in emphasizing the arbitrary nature of language but the meaning of the term arbitrary stands in need of being specified. Language is arbitrary in the sense that altogether different sets of symbols could have been used in place of the ones that are in use but once a symbol is used in language it becomes internalized. It becomes a part of the

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<sup>1</sup>John Locke, op.cit., p.12.

system of linguistic convention. Moreover, the presence of onomatopoeic expression in every language goes to suggest that some of the words in our language are not arbitrarily chosen. Onomatopoeic expression in a way pictures in their phonetic form the nature of the object named by it. As for example the English expression "hiss" to a large extent pictures the sounds made by the snake.

Later on Locke was not much interested in inventing the kinds of signs in use, rather he was confined to the more important question, i.e. what does the sign signify? Usually, we think that the word "book" is the sign of a physical object. Thus generally we say words signify physical things, at least to some extent it holds good. But Locke denies this categorically. He says, a word instead of signifying physical things, signifies the idea. An idea has frequently a reference beyond itself, and in this way, no doubt, the word may signify a thing, but directly it signifies the idea. Locke says, "words, in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing but the ideas in the

mind of him that uses them."<sup>1</sup> So one's own word or utterance signifies directly one's own idea only. This idea is the atom of meaning, expressed by a word which is an atom of language.

But if each of us were content to keep all our thoughts to himself, language could have been dispensed with, it is only because we feel a need to convey our thoughts to each other that we have to make use of publicly observable indications of purely private ideas.

Let me further analyse this. For each linguistic expression there would have to be an idea such that when any expression is used in that sense it is used as an indication of the presence of that idea. This presumably means that whenever an expression is used in that sense, viz., (a) the idea must be present in the mind of the speaker, (b) the speaker must be producing the expression in order to get his audience to realize that the idea in question is in his mind at that time. Finally, the expression would have to call up some

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

idea in the mind of the hearer. In at least the classical empiricist tradition, the word "idea" is taken as equivalent to the word "image". The meaning of an expression, on this theory, therefore comes to be identified with an "image" (of whichever sort). Moreover, it will lead to the absurd conclusion that not only the same expression will have different meanings for the same person at different occasions but also different meanings for different persons on the same occasion. The same expression for example 'tiger' may evoke different images in the mind of the same person on different occasions. Shall we, then, say that the expression "tiger" has different meanings? Again when a speaker uses the expression 'tiger' it may evoke the image of, say a 'cat' in the minds of the hearer. Shall we, then, say, the expression ('tiger') means, tiger for the speaker and cat for the hearer? What about the sentences used in a book, which is not read by anybody at present? Are the sentences in the book meaningful or meaningless? An empiricist ought to say that the expressions are meaningless. For they do not evoke any image. What images are evoked by the utterance of such

expressions as 'if', 'not', 'but', etc.? Again whenever at random we are uttering a sentence there is no such distinguishable idea corresponding to each of the meaningful linguistic units of the sentence. For example "whenever in the course of human history it becomes necessary for .....  
 ....etc." Is there a distinguishable idea in one's mind corresponding to each of the linguistic units of this utterance? Can one discern an idea of 'when', 'in', 'course', 'becomes', etc.? If at all one can, can one recognize the idea that accompanies 'when' in that sense? Is it something that is identifiable and producible apart from words? Thus the image if any, at all evoked of the utterance of expression is not a part of the meaning of expression. Language might be used to evoke certain types of images, sensations and feelings but these are no part of the meanings. This theory of meaning cuts at the root of the fact that language is conventional.

What is disturbing about the questions raised above is not that they have one answer other than another, but that we do not know how to go

about answering them. What we are supposed to look for by way of an idea of 'when'? How can we tell whether we have it in mind or not? The real difficulty is that we are unable to spot 'idea' as we would have to test the ideational theory.

Again, Locke is wrong in saying that meaning is something which one does or undergoes while uttering. Because if we understand meaning in this way, communication will be paralysed, since no one can know what is going on in the speaker's mind. So naturally we cannot know the meaning of anyone's utterance. Secondly if an inner act theory of meaning is correct, it is very difficult to say that an inner process is going on when we utter some words but in case of animals no such process goes on. Thus Locke cannot claim, when a parrot makes articulate sounds there by it does not mean anything and is not using language. How does Locke know that the inner process is not going on in the case of a parrot?

Berkeley argues on the other hand that words owe their meanings to the idea associated with it, but so far as the abstract ideas are concerned

there is a disagreement between Locke and Berkeley. Locke's notion of abstract idea has been discarded by Berkeley. He says that one cannot think of a general idea as such. For example, / one cannot have an idea of 'beauty' as such. The idea of 'beauty' one can talk about only with reference to a particular flower, painting, cottage, etc.. So meaning is always associated with specific idea of image. In principle, there is no difference between Locke's and Berkeley's theory of meaning. Berkeley's wordings in the introduction of his Principles is: /

Whoever therefore designs to read the following sheets, I entreat him to make my words the occasion of his own thinking, and endeavour to attain the same train of thoughts in reading, that I had in writing them. By this means it will be easy for him to discover the truth or falsity of what I say. He will be out of all danger of being deceived by my words, and I do not see how he can be led into error by considering his own naked, undisguised ideas.<sup>1</sup>

So both Locke and Berkeley agree to the point that meaning of a word depends upon the idea associated with it.

Hume's theory of meaning was different from

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<sup>1</sup>George Berkeley, A New Theory of Vision And other Writings, p.111.

that of his predecessors' but in spirit it agrees with that of Locke and Berkeley. Hume says that to understand the meaning of a word is to associate it with a kind of 'idea' and 'idea' is a quasi sensory state. Like his predecessors Hume also says that there is no radical distinction between thinking, imagining, meaning, understanding. Since Hume includes imagining in the list, thus it is natural that he will not make any absolute sharp distinction between, when one thinks about a problem and when one perceives a real object like 'table'. Hume calls the sense-data of normal perceptions as 'impressions' and the difference between impressions and ideas is merely one of degree only. Hume says in his Treatise:

Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning.<sup>1</sup>

Hume relates impressions and ideas in different ways, viz., in terms of exact resemblance,

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<sup>1</sup>David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, Book I, part.I, p.1.

derivability of ideas from impressions, priority of impressions to ideas, constant conjunction of the two etc.. Among these, Hume gives importance only to the priority of impressions to ideas. Hume employs this priority of impressions to ideas as the criterion of meaning. Hume's conviction was, 'any expression which is not ultimately cashable by means of impressions is to be regarded as devoid of cognitive significance'. The major difficulty with Hume's thesis of impression is the difficulty with the privacy of impressions, since the data of our experience are inaccessible to others, it is impossible to communicate our ideas by language.

Thus the empiricist concept of meaning in general is defective. The blunder they committed was that they were psychologizing logic. Bradley is right in pointing out that:

In England at all events we have lived too long in the psychological attitude. We take it for granted and as a matter of course that, like sensations and emotions, ideas are phenomena. And, considering these phenomena as psychological facts, we have tried to distinguish between ideas and sensations. But, intent on this, we have as good as forgotten the way in which logic uses ideas.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>F.H. Bradley, The Principles of Logic, Vol.I, p.2.

Secondly, empiricists confused between two senses of ideas, viz., "idea" as "meaning" and "idea" as "image". They were arguing that the meaning is the mental picture. Meaning can be analysed in terms of mental pictures, mental images, subjective simple ideas etc.. For example, when one says "The bird is sitting on the top of the tree". In this case the empiricist will claim that the meaning of this sentence depends upon the mental picture or subjective simple ideas produced by it. But this way of analyzing the notion of meaning is defective. Because the mental picture may vary from person to person. So Frege is right in pointing out that empiricists confuse between meaning and reference. An expression may have a reference and sometimes the image evoked by it is the reference. But it is not part of the meaning of the expression. Bradley puts this position nicely :

And, if you take this mere idea by itself, it is an adjective divorced, a parasite cut loose, a spirit without a body seeking rest in another, an abstraction from the concrete, a mere possibility...<sup>1</sup>

Bradley tried to rescue empiricistic theory

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp.7,8.

of meanings out of its mentalistic associations. Ideas as meanings, cannot be associated with mental contents and images. Ideas as meanings are like Platonic universals free from any admixture of mental or psychic images. I may conclude now that the ideational theory of the empiricists is defective because it is rooted in private experience and ipso facto the criterion of right use and wrong use ultimately becomes private.

#### Part - II

The primary function of language is to facilitate communication. Language consists of words and sentences. But problem comes regarding the meaningfulness of the small units of our language. We have already seen the failure of the empiricists regarding the explanation of meaning.

✓ Meaning can be understood by looking into the use of our language. Wittgenstein rightly points out - "For a large class of cases though not for all in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus : the meaning of a word is

its use in the language".<sup>1</sup> The significance of the words is determined by the concrete situation in which it is used. For example, one may think of 'time' in the model of a stream such as 'time' like a river, flows from the future into the past through the present carrying the events or occurrences with them. These oddities regarding the use of the concept of 'time' spring up if we do not take care to find out the actual ways in which the term "time" functions in our language. So absurdities like time is a substance, it is the name of a peculiar ethereal, medium in which the events occur are generated. This kind of use may be termed as the metaphysical use of expression. One remains in a state of virtual puzzlement as long as one uses expressions beyond context. So the only way to put an end to this confusion is to bring back the expression from their metaphysical use to their ordinary use. Instead of considering in abstraction what the meaning of a particular expression is one has to go back to the actual context in which the term is meaningfully used.)

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<sup>1</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Sec. 265.

✓ Words as such are meaningless. But they obtain their significance in their employment in different contexts. ✓

But the notion of 'use' is again very ambiguous for there are different aspects of the use of a word and what these aspects will vary with the kind of thing in question. In Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein enumerates these different aspects. First of all one can say that words are used as the materials of our speaking and writing. Words are things with which we want to utter or write something, just as it is food-stuff that we most often use as the materials of cooking. But this aspect of the use of words is not of much importance because, from this point all words might be said to have the same function.

A more significant aspect has to do with the grammar of the word in question. Every language has a grammar, i.e., certain rules which every user of the language must obey. The violation of these rules leads to meaninglessness, for example :

"The \_\_\_\_\_ is taking tea". A set of words like

'saturday', 'goodness' can never be substituted for the blank, but 'man', 'boy', 'girl' can well occupy the blank space. If somebody frames a sentence substituting saturday for the blank space, he will render himself unintelligible and it will prove that he does not know how to use language. Knowing how to use the word in this aspect of use includes knowing in what sorts of linguistic contexts the word can occur without grammatical oddity.

Words are also used to do certain things, to perform certain linguistic jobs. When we speak of the word in this way we mean that words are used to perform certain speech acts. The grammarians rough classification does not actually correspond to various kinds of speech acts, for example, declarative sentences are not always used to state something and also interrogative sentences are not always used to ask questions. The sentence "Am I a fool?" uttered by a father, though interrogative in form is not actually interrogative. This means that he is not actually a fool. Though it is in interrogative form, it does not perform this speech

act of questioning a man rather it has an assertive force.

When we speak of using words to perform speech acts we are concerned with the use of the word to do or to accomplish one thing or the other. The use of words to do something ought to be distinguished from the use of words in doing something. By that Wittgenstein means their use in speech activities, for example, // in course of narrating a story one can make use of declarative sentence in interrogative sentences. Here narrating an experience is speech activity in which different speech acts occur.

Semantic condition is another important aspect of the use of words. A given word group is meaningfully used when certain conditions are fulfilled. To say this is to say that there are certain semantic regularities associated with the utterance of a given word group. If for example, two people A and B are having their dinner with all the usual items in the table and with the salt celler near B, A can say "Please pass the salt"

without the least oddity, without deviating from any semantic regularities, for this is the kind of situation in which those words are generally uttered. But under these same conditions A can't say to B "look out for the horse" without deviating from semantic regularities, although he can say it without oddity for example - if he says it playfully as part of a game they play at dinner, or if he says it in the course of telling a story to B over their dinner.

Wittgenstein insists that to escape from philosophical puzzlement one has to command a clear view of actual workings of language. (So instead of treating the words in abstraction one has to mark the actual context in which the word can be meaningfully employed.) He says do not think but look. But by insisting so he does not urge upon us to look to the grammatical aspects of the use of words. Grammar is important to the extent that it is necessary to form a meaningful sentence, but this is not all. To make a correct use of a sentence or word group is also to ensure that the necessary conditions for the meaningful

employment of the word are also available.

To speak a language is to behave in certain highly complex ways, which require a skill of a very sophisticated sort, and which can be right or wrong, correct or incorrect. To speak a language is to exercise certain techniques. Linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour are woven together into an intricate organic whole. Let us see how a child learns the meaning of a word 'ball'. Making the sound 'ball' or writing the word ball is not enough, since a parrot or an idiot can do that. What more is required, then? Well, what has the child learned when he has learned the meaning of the word ball? To begin with, he has learned to behave in certain ways; he has learned for example, to reply 'ball' if someone, pointing to a ball, asks, 'What is this?' if asked to draw a picture of ball, he does so, when asked which of several objects is the ball, he picks the right one, he speaks in appropriate ways. So speaking a language which includes understanding, is engaging in certain modes of behaviour that exhibit in variety of ability and skill. It is to engage in what Wittgenstein

calls forms of life.

The modes of behaviour are so very important that Wittgenstein compares the using of words to the playing of games. Words are not pictures but pieces used in various language games and just as the significance of a piece in a chess board depends on the type of move which it takes, so the meaning of a word is its role in the various language games in which it figures. As Wittgenstein puts it "an expression has meaning only in the stream of life".<sup>1</sup> So if we forget these intimate connections between language and behaviour and try to treat words in isolation from the actual situation in which they are used we end up in riddles and paradoxes. And if the above explanation of meaning is satisfactory, the criterion of right use and wrong use cannot be private.

If private experience is treated as the criterion of the right and wrong use of language then (i) we cannot learn a language, (ii) we cannot teach a language to anybody, (iii) we cannot decide

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<sup>1</sup>Norman Malcolm, Ludwig Wittgenstein A Memoir, p.93.

between the right use and wrong use of sentences. To learn a language means to learn how to use words under certain situations. If these situations were purely private then we couldn't learn a language. Even words referring to one's "inner" feelings must be learned in situations which are public. Take the word "depression". I might be referring to certain mental states of mind by it but I learn this word not by looking at the "inner" states of others when they use the word. When we teach a language to somebody we do not teach with reference to his private experiences and feelings rather we teach it with reference to imaginable and actual situations. The treatment of private experience as the criterion of learning will not help us in distinguishing between the right and wrong use of expressions. When we say that a sentence is rightly and wrongly used we do not say ~~them~~ with reference to somebody's private experience rather we decide between the right and wrong use of an expression with reference to external situations. If the criterion of learning, teaching and distinguishing between right use

and wrong use of language cannot be private then  
no language can be private. To be a language  
means to be learnable and teachable. Teachability  
and learnability are dependent on external situations.  
External situations are necessarily tied to internal  
and private situations.

CHAPTER - IV  
CONCEPTS OF 'PRIVATE', 'PRIVATE LANGUAGE'  
AND 'PRIVATE EXPERIENCE' : AN EXPOSITION

The concept of 'private' is opposed to that of 'public'. The literal meaning of the term 'Private' according to the Oxford English Dictionary is that which is "kept away or removed from public knowledge", "not open to public", "personal", "not affecting the community" etc.. Accordingly, we do talk of private property, private enterprise, private letter, private chamber, private motor car, etc.. In these cases there remains the possibility of throwing these things to public. As for example, a motor car which is put to personal or private use may also be kept open for public use. A house which is used as private residence may be converted to a club house or a public library. In this sense, the term 'private' refers to personal ownership, whereas public refers to collective ownership. Thus, here private and public can be distinguished in terms of ownership or use. A motor car or a house is regarded as private if the number of its owners is relatively small and its use is exclusive, whereas if the number of owners and users is relatively large then the vehicle or the house, is regarded as public.

In philosophy, when we discuss the problem of private language, the word 'private' may be used in a similar sense. Although, here, the idea of "intelligibility" must also be added. Those who would argue in favour of private language in this sense may claim that, a language is regarded as private when it is intelligible only to a limited number of people or to one person only. This point will be clear if we consider the following examples. Imagine the case of Robinson Crusoe in an island, he may devise his own language to maintain his daily diary, instead of his mother tongue. He may not be using any other languages which he knows. He might be using arbitrary symbols, but the language is translatable to any other languages which he knows. This language is purely personal<sup>al</sup> and private in the sense that Robinson Crusoe is the only one who understands it. Two friends may decide to correspond with each other not in any known languages, but in an "artificial" language, devised and mutually agreed upon. The intelligence personnel use a code language which cannot be deciphered except in a close circle. In this sense the morse code is also

private. The morse code cannot be deciphered by anybody who is not conversant with it. In this sense private, personal, secret and confidential are near synonyms. As we saw, to say that something is private means that a particular person or a group of persons has access to it or right to use it. So a language is sometimes regarded as private, if it is used only in a particular exclusive group. Language of the intelligence personnel, morse code, symbolic language used by friends are private only in this sense. To say that these languages are private is to say that these are usually used by a particular more or less small group. But from the fact that a language is used by a particular group it does not follow that it is intelligible to that group alone and nobody else can possibly understand this language. Others could very well understand the morse code or the language of the intelligence personnel if they were given proper training. But philosophically speaking perhaps these languages may not be called private in the sense in which there is a controversy about the concept of a private language.

Private language, in the last sense, is that language which is intelligible exclusively to one person only. Here the possibility that others can understand the language is totally ruled out. Thus when a philosopher uses the term 'private' to qualify a language and argues either for or against it, he is likely to define it not in terms of ownership or use but in terms of its necessary intelligibility to one person only. If language is defined as a system of phonemes and morphemes, no language can be private in the foregoing sense. The same set of phonemes and morphemes can be used by any person. If I use the sentence "The cat before me is black in colour", to describe the cat before me, the same sentence can be used by anybody to characterize any black cat. The defenders of the private language argument cannot claim now the symbols or the vocal sounds to be private. Only the meaning conveyed by the sentence can be regarded as private. Those who explain meaning in terms of private image, mental contents, subjective simple ideas for them meaning is bound to be private. This thesis I have

already explained and examined in my previous chapter, and the conclusion I have reached is that meaning cannot be explained in terms of private image, subjective simple ideas, it has to be understood in terms of the use of our language.

Let me distinguish now between experience on the one hand and occurrence, happenings and events on the other hand. Like an experience an occurrence, event or happening takes place in space and time. Experience is an occurrence in the sense that it occurs, happens or takes place. All these are similar in the sense that they are spatio-temporal happenings. Except this similarity the difference between experience and occurrence, events and happenings is so much that it is wrong to treat them as belonging to the same logical type. There cannot be any experience without an experient. There must be a person to experience something. The concept of person is internally connected with the concept of experience. If 'E' is an experience then there must be an experient of it. We cannot simply talk of experience without an experient. But there can be occurrences,

events and happenings without there being a person to experience it. An event need not be an event to anybody. An occurrence may not occur to anybody. A happening need not happen to anybody. A flood, a cyclone, an earthquake are events and happenings, but they are not necessarily the experiences of anybody.

There is a clear sense in which occurrences, happenings and events are public. They happen there in the 'public world'. But experiences are bound to be private, further a private or personal occurrence can be regarded as experience. If somebody puts his finger into fire, the finger burns. This occurrence is purely private in the sense that others cannot experience the same burning sensation. If somebody is suffering from certain pain it is purely private because others cannot experience the same pain. Others may suffer similar sorts of pain but they cannot suffer exactly the same pain.

The proper conclusion from the linking of meaning to private experiences ought really to be not that a particular language could be private, but that all language is private. As all experiences

are bound to be private so all languages are bound to be private. This really is implicit in the general thesis of ~~Empiricism~~ empiricism which bases all languages relating to matters of fact on sense experience. The phonemes and morphemes of a language are surely public that is to say that the same morphemic and phonemic system can be used by many people. When it is argued that language is private it is not maintained that phonemes and morphemes are private. As a matter of fact, phonemes and morphemes of any language are public in the sense that persons belonging to a particular linguistic community use the same sort of symbols in their communication. Those who argue that language is private, do not argue that these phonemic and morphemic system is private. Also every language has a grammar. Language is governed by grammatical rules. Those who argue in support of the private language do not claim that grammatical rules of a language are private. The speakers of a language do not use private grammatical rules. Those who speak English language must abide by the rules of English grammar. One is not free to frame his own

grammar. One may perfectly follow the rules of English grammar, one may follow exactly the same phonemes, yet one may not convey one's thoughts, and therefore, one's meaning to others. So the claim of the private-language thesis really amounts to this : what gives meaning to language is the thoughts, intentions, motives - in one word - experiences which lie, as it were, behind the language. But one has no genuine access to another person's thoughts, etc.. The possibility of such an access would imply that two persons can have the very same thoughts etc.. And this latter is impossible. No person can, therefore, truly understand another's language.

The logical positivists while advocating the verification theory of meaning have to face such a problem of linguistic privacy and solipsism. The contents of language can be verified only by the subject concerned but this content cannot be made public in a way in which they will be ~~be~~ accessible to others.

There is however another thesis which must be distinguished from the private language thesis

as spelled out above. This thesis, unlike the private language thesis, is not only plausible, but might even be correct. This is the thesis that although our experiences are private, our ideas, intentions, motives etc., need not be wholly private. They are to a large extent accessible to others. In spite of this however it may be impossible in any given case to be certain about ~~any~~<sup>an</sup> other person's intentions, motives, etc.. So there is perhaps an inalienable private element in our language. The point may become clear if we consider cases where the speaker is not present. When we read a piece of poem, usually the author of the poem is not present there. How can we decipher the exact feelings and emotions which lie behind the written words. A piece of poem is not simply an aggregate of linguistic symbols put in black and white, if the feelings and emotions of the poet that endow significance on it. Unless we know these feelings and emotions, we cannot understand the poem. But perhaps, it is impossible for us ever completely to know and understand the feelings and emotions of the poet.

CHAPTER - V  
CONCLUSION

I would like, in this Chapter, partly to discuss in some detail one of Wittgenstein's more frequently quoted arguments against the possibility of a necessarily private language. The argument may be stated as follows.

Suppose per impossibile there is such a private language intelligible only to the speaker of the language and never, in principle, to anybody else. Also suppose 'S' is the name of a sensation in this language. But for 'S' to be a word in this language there must be a criterion of its correct application at any given time. In this case however the only possible criterion of correctness would be the memory of the user of the language in question. But the availability of the concept of memory depends equally on the availability of criteria of correctness of any particular memory claim. In the case of the imaginary language however no such criteria are available. The user of the language can appeal to nothing other than the memory impression itself whose correctness is in question. And this will not serve the purpose of a criterion for the simple

reason that an appeal to the memory impression itself cannot in principle contain any grounds for its correctness or otherwise. As Wittgenstein says "As if someone were to buy several copies of the morning paper to assure himself that what it said was true."<sup>1</sup> In the absence of any criteria of correctness for the use of 's', 's' cannot therefore be a word in a private language. Since this will be true for all words in a necessarily private language, such a language therefore is impossible.

The force of the argument has frequently been misunderstood. It has been thought for instance that what Wittgenstein is demanding here is the availability of a logically completely trustworthy memory. And it is pointed out that no memory impression whatever can be logically completely trustworthy this way. Since the possibility, is not only of a private language but also of a public language crucially depends on the availability of memory, a demand for a totally trustworthy memory in the above sense would make

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<sup>1</sup>Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Amcombe, Sec. 265.

all language impossible. Wittgenstein's argument would thus, it is pointed out, have proved too much.

This criticism of Wittgenstein's argument is, I believe, based on a simple but important misunderstanding of Wittgenstein. I do not think it was ever a part of Wittgenstein's claim that the concept of memory would not be available to us unless we could get hold of a memory which was logically indubitable. All he needed to and did insist upon was that in deciding whether a particular memory impression was correct or not one must have access to consideration other than an appeal to the memory impressions itself. And he believed that in the case of the imaginary private language this was ruled out.

But why did he believe so? His reason for believing so might be spelt out as follows - our public language of sensations is a language at all because there are mutually accepted rules governing the use of its words. What makes it possible that there are such rules is the important fact that our sensations are inalienably bound up

with the regularity of the objective or the public world. However, in the case of private language such as we envisaged about this link with the objective world must be assumed to have collapsed, for otherwise the language could become intelligible to another person via a perception of this link. But once this link is assumed to have collapsed, it would follow that our so called "inner world" is totally chaotic. This is because the only thing that endows orderliness to our experiences is the fact of there being logically rooted in the regularity of the objective world. (This argument is strongly reminiscent of the famous Kantian argument called the transcendental deduction of the categories in the Critique of Pure Reason). But if the experiences which would be the subject matter of a necessarily private language were bound to be chaotic in this way, no rules could be brought to bare upon them, because the availability of rules depends necessarily on the availability of observable regularity. There could therefore be no rules governing governing the use of a necessarily private language.

And this also means that there could be no criterion of correctness for the application of any word in this language. And since memory would have been the only criterion of correctness here, there would thus be no memory either.

It may perhaps be said it is not absolutely clear that the above argument is wholly Wittgensteinian. However, I do not here want to go into question of interpretation of Wittgenstein. All I want to say is that I find the above argument, whoever might have held or not held it, philosophically highly plausible.

If a necessarily private language is impossible it will seem to follow that all our experiences must be capable of being expressed and talked about in the public language. There are however, so it might be said, interesting cases of claims of people having experiences which cannot be expressed or talked about clearly in a public language. Such for instance are the experiences of the mystics. The possibility of mystical experiences raises perhaps important

philosophical questions. Unfortunately, I cannot go into these questions here. The only point I wish to make is as follows<sup>①</sup> .

Mystical experience, if there were any, would be such that not only would it be inexpressible in a public language but it would be inexpressible, in a literal sense, in any language whatever. It is not as though the mystic has a language in terms of which he converses with himself and with nobody else about his private mystical experiences and this language is necessarily untranslatable into a public language. Such experiences to the extent that they are inexpressible in a public language are inexpressible in any language whatever. And perhaps this is what Wittgenstein meant when he said at the end of the Tractatus that "where of one cannot speak there of one must be silent."<sup>1</sup> We may add perhaps that there of one must be silent even to oneself.

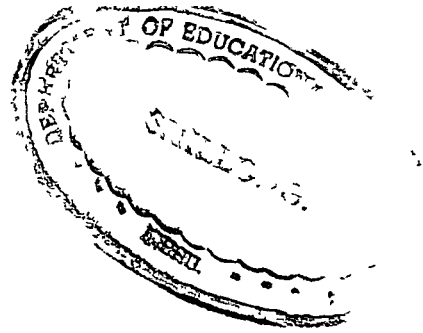
Sometimes in Indian philosophy the claim is made that there is such a thing as totally

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<sup>1</sup>Ludwig, Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, Trans. D.F.Pears & B.F.McGuinness, Apphorism 7.

structureless experience (chaotic in our above sense). Such experience as sometimes called nirvikalpaka pratyaksa and this is also sometimes thought to be the basis of all experiences. I have found this view hard to make intelligible to myself.

My claim that all experiences which are intelligible at all must be expressible in a public language, must be distinguished from the claim that occasionally because of one or another impediment people are not able to express their inner feelings in language. Such impediment might be : limitations of vocabulary (for instance when one is trying to say something in a foreign language); physical defects such as dumbness and any other speech disorder and so on. But such limitations are in principle capable of being overcome, unlike the limitations regarding say, mystical experiences.



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