

# SOLIPSISM, PRIVATE LANGUAGE, AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF OTHER MINDS: IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERSUBJECTIVITY

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## ABSTRACT

*An enquiry into solipsism, as an epistemological problem in philosophy, would largely correlate with the private language argument, especially as advanced by Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's discourse on language generally contrasts private language with public language. Whereas solipsism accords with private language, arguments in favour of public language invariably favour the possibility of knowing other minds. Presupposing that there is a necessary connection between mind and matter or the mental and the physical aspects of man, this study advances the thesis that one can gain a considerable knowledge of other minds through their external or physical manifestations or expressions. In addition to establishing the possibility of knowing other minds from the background of Wittgenstein's private language argument and the refutation of solipsism and skepticism, this discourse highlights the imports of such knowledge in interpersonal relationship. In other words, in the light of Wittgenstein's conception of language as an all-embracing feature of man's existence, it examines the extent to which the knowledge of other minds can advance man's social intercourse. Thus, a rational investigation into the possibility of knowing other minds, the extent or degree of such knowledge, and the establishment of its usefulness constitute the basic concerns of this philosophical enquiry. Save being an expository discourse, therefore, the study aims at expanding the boundaries of human knowledge by exploring the implications of the essential constituents of its subject matter.*

**Keywords:** Solipsism, Skepticism, Human mind, Private language, Intersubjectivity

## INTRODUCTION

Philosophical discourses on the knowledge of other minds generally border on the extent to which thoughts, feelings and indeed the general mental states of other rational beings can be accessed and truly known. They especially investigate “how” and “the means” of knowing other minds. Articulating the major concerns of the knowledge of other minds, as an epistemological problem, B.O. Eboh (2003:143), in a related discourse, writes: “The problem before us is to find out whether the mental state of another human being can be known? If it can be known, how does one know it and to what extent is it known? What are the facets or medium through which it is possible to know it? Can it be known certainly as the possessor knows it?”

The philosophy of mind, as a branch of philosophy that studies the human mind, acknowledges an intricate interconnectedness of the Greek terms: *nous* (mind or intellect), *psyche* (mind, soul, or spirit), *pneuma* (spirit), and *thumos* (soul or heart). In spite of the possible subtle variations, the meanings of these terms overlap; they generally border on such mental phenomena and processes as sensation, perception, thought, belief, desire, intention, memory, emotion, and imagination. The philosophy of mind investigates these mental processes, especially in relation to their outward or visible manifestations. This presupposes that there is a relationship between the mind and the body, between man's mental states and their physical or corporeal gestures or indicators, where the latter constitute a possible gateway to the knowledge of the former.

In the light of Wittgenstein's arguments in favour of public language, this philosophical discourse aims at refuting solipsism and advancing the thesis that the knowledge of other minds is possible. It is also a basic presupposition of this discourse that, as an essentially social being, man's authentic existence is a function of his intersubjective experience; he finds fulfilment in the interchange of thoughts, feelings and mutual co-existence. Accordingly, the discourse not only explores the special imports of language in the knowledge of other minds but also highlights the implications of such knowledge for intersubjectivity and the contemporary human society.

### **THE HUMAN MIND: A QUINTESSENTIAL FRAMEWORK OF MENTAL PROCESSES**

The nature of the human mind has always been a philosophical issue of great concern among the ancient Greek philosophers, the scholastics, modern philosophers as well as modern and contemporary psychologists. The varying approaches to this problem notwithstanding, the basic presupposition is that there is a relationship between human mind and body. The basis of the controversy usually associated with this issue is mainly the nature of this interaction. Thus, Hume's (1896:259) description of the mind as a bundle of perception or a series of perceptions in rapid succession, William James' (1890:239) conception of the mind as a stream of consciousness, and the epiphenomenalists' view of the activities of the mind or mental events as a function of the physical events in the brain or a by-product of the brain, presuppose the existence of a corporeal subject that undergoes these psychological experiences.

Rene Descartes' egocentric approach to the search for certainty, which marked a formal formulation of the mind-body problem, culminates in an inherently solipsistic theory of knowledge. Descartes' (1998:18-19) distinction, in his *Discourse on Method*, between the *res cogitans* (a thinking and unextended thing) and the *res extensa* (an unthinking and extended thing) postulates a 'self' that is intrinsically solipsistic, given that his idea of 'the ego' suggests a solitary consciousness that is not spatially extended and not necessarily located in any body. Buttressing this idea, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, he further avers: "And as I converse with myself alone and look more deeply into myself, I will attempt to render myself gradually better known and more familiar to myself. I am a thing that thinks, that is to say, a thing that doubts, affirms, denies, understands a few things, is ignorant of many things, wills, refrains from willing, and also imagines and senses" (Descartes, 1998:70). By implication, the contents of one's mind, thoughts, emotions, perceptions, desires, etc., are accessible only

to the individual possessor and no one else. One, therefore, finds in Descartes' philosophy a strict substance dualism that expresses a rejection of the Scholastics' thesis that the human person is a composite of mind, perceived as form, and body, perceived as matter. This position also opposes Hobbes' (1963:73&116) materialistic solution to the mind-body problem, an understanding of the mind, human thoughts, or perception as matter in motion.

Descartes' position makes it difficult for him to accept all the implications of his perspective on the mind-body relationship. Hence, in *The Passions of the Soul*, he acknowledges that although mind is distinct from matter, the former still wields influence on the latter. Indeed, matter also affects the mind; if, for instance, the brain is damaged, the mind would cease to function properly. For Descartes (1649: Art 16-41), the “the pineal gland,” located at the center of the brain substance, is the “principal seat of the soul” and the seat of mind-body interaction. Thus, he maintains an interactionist view of the mind-body relationship.

While sharing Descartes' view that the mind and the body are two different substances, Malebranche and Geulincx denied any interaction between them. For them, there is no causal link between the actions in the mind and those in the body. In his *Opera Philosophica*, for instance, Geulincx proposed the theory of *occasionalism* or *parallelism* as possible solution to the mind-body interaction. For him, there are always two parallel series of human actions going on simultaneously, one physical and the other mental. When one wills to posit an action, God moves one's body to posit an action parallel to one's thought. Through the manipulation of matter, God arouses some thoughts in us for which we cannot claim responsibility. Therefore, he concluded: “there is a knowing and willing being distinct from me” (Geulincx, 1892:150).

Although John Locke's view of matter, to a very large extent, concurred with that of Descartes, he rejected the latter's theory that the mind possesses ideas innately at birth. Locke (1825:51) rather maintained that all ideas have their origins in experience. According to him, 'reflection' (i.e. introspection or inner experience) is the source of psychological concepts or the materials of reason and knowledge. By implication, one acquires one's psychological concepts independently of one's bodily states. In fact, for Locke (1825:385), knowledge is but “the perception of the connection of an agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas.” Locke's insistence that reflection affords the mind of some ideas that have nothing to do with external objects, and that the mind gets some ideas only by reflecting on its own operations within itself, lend credence to solipsism and skepticism. Similarly, Kant's (1998:348-365) idea of *noumenon* or unknowable “thing-in-itself” and the sense-data argument also constitute considerable sources of skepticism.

In the context of this discourse, the human mind is not just considered as a cognitive faculty, but embraces all mental, psychological, and emotional phenomena as well as immediate experiences, as contrasted with their external or physical manifestations. Hence, the concept of mind refers to the totality of man's inner experiences and mental processes; it designates an embodiment of all mental processes especially as associated with some outward manifestations or observable signs.

## SKEPTICISM AND THE PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT

The concept of “Private language”, in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, is contrasted with that of “public language”. His private language argument basically aims at demonstrating the impossibility of a language that is exclusively concerned with things only known to the user. Such language would deal only with the individual possessor's sensations and subjective experiences. Indeed, some laudable philosophical arguments have been advanced on both sides of the controversy. While some philosophers advance the view that there is a possibility of private language, others argue that human language is essentially public.

The immediate background to Wittgenstein's arguments against private language is captured in the philosophical discourses bordering on skepticism and solipsism. Skepticism, generally understood as the philosophical viewpoint that certain knowledge can never be attained, is one of the central issues addressed in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. In fact, a critical reading of the *Investigations* reveals that the refutation of skepticism and solipsism is one of the basic preoccupations of the private language argument.

Prior to Wittgenstein's arguments, some efforts were made to refute skepticism and thereby save human knowledge. For instance, from Heraclitus' idea that everything is in constant flux and that we cannot step into the same river twice, some elements of skepticism can be deduced as it subtly expresses man's inability to grasp fixed and immutable truth. Parmenides' and Zeno's efforts at proving that change and motion are illusions could be considered a response to skepticism implicit in Heraclitus' thoughts. Similarly, Socrates' advocacy for universal definitions expresses a possibility of acquiring indubitable knowledge. His insistence that man has the capacity to attain this type of knowledge implies a rejection of Gorgias' and Protagoras' relativism (Plato, 1961: 72c, 74d).

In Plato's works, one also finds very pronounced attempts to save human knowledge from skepticism. This is evident in his *Theory of Divided Line*, where he distinguished different levels of knowledge according to their respective objects, that is, imagining (image), belief (thing), thinking (mathematical object), and knowledge (the good). For him, skepticism mainly obtains at the level of “imagining” and “belief”, given that human knowledge on this level is mainly based on opinion and that the objects of such knowledge are constantly changing. At the level of “thinking”, human knowledge has high level of certainty and at the level of “knowledge”, man beholds reality as it is: unchanging, eternal, and one. In fact, at this level, there is no room for doubt since man knows “the Form.” According to him, man attains this knowledge by way of reason and not merely through the senses (Plato, 1941: Book VI, 509d – 513e).

In the Medieval Ages, St. Augustine's *Contra Academicos* aimed at attacking the version of skepticism of the Academics. For Augustine (1957:66-67), human reason is absolutely certain of the principle of contradiction. For instance, we know that a thing cannot be and not be at the same time, in the same place and in the same manner. Human mind is, therefore, not hopelessly lost in uncertainty as the Skeptics would hold. For Augustine, too, the doubter is at least sure of his existence since he must exist in order to doubt. He also argues that if the

Skeptic maintains that we cannot know anything for certain, it implies that he is certain of this; otherwise, he has no grounds for his arguments.

Still with a view to tackling skepticism, Descartes, in his *Discourse on Method*, sought to establish certainty on the grounds of his thinking and existence. Associating the act of doubting with thinking, Descartes (1998:72) maintained that it must be the case that he who thinks exists; hence, he asserted: “cogito ergo sum” (I think, therefore, I exist). According to him, “from the fact that I doubt, it follows that I am.” From the truth of his existence, then, he proceeded to establish the existence of other things.

For his part, Hume (1896:180-218) dismissed all forms of inductive reasoning as inconclusive, arguing that they rest on the false assumption that nature is uniform and that all future occurrences must accord with the past ones. Hume's primary aim was to demonstrate how insoluble skepticism is as a problem of philosophy. For him, man cannot but be skeptical; he cannot even suspend judgment without going mad, because “nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determined us to judge as well as to breathe and feel” (Hume, 1896:183).

In the light of his conviction that any philosophical conclusion must accord with common sense in order to be meaningful, Thomas Reid (1997:52-59) expressed strong reservations about philosophical skepticism. His common-sense realism was, in fact, aimed at discrediting skepticism. Remarkably, his idea of “common sense” as denoting something meaningful to the community in the day to day activities of her members largely accords with Wittgenstein's view that the meaning of a word is determined by the community use.

Kant also conceived human knowledge as possible and so considered extreme skepticism untenable. For him, apart from metaphysical and religious truths which belong to the noumenal world and so not accessible to human reason, every other thing within space and time or the phenomenal world can be known. Notably, very much like Plato's “world of forms”, Kant's (1998:348-365) doctrine of “things-in-themselves” (i.e., things beyond our knowledge), gives some credence to skepticism, as it suggests that what we know are not the real things but appearances. However, though Kant may not have adequately responded to Hume's skepticism, his thoughts constitute very laudable attempt at saving human knowledge.

G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, in the contemporary period re-presented Kant's idea of “phenomenon” as “sense-data”. Articulating the central idea expressed in his “sense data theory” Russell (1980:8) writes: “If several people are looking at the table at the same moment, not two of them will see exactly the same distribution of colours, because no two can see it from exactly the same point of view....” The epistemological significance of this theory is that it narrows perception to a private experience. Given that whatever a person perceives is basically private to him, his statements or language are about his private objects of perception or the “sense data”. This line of thought obviously accords with and indeed lends credence to arguments in favour of the possibility of private language. While acknowledging the difficulty involved in experiencing the world from another person's perspective, Wittgenstein, in his

“beetle in a box argument”, critically attacks the notion that experience is necessarily private. According to Wittgenstein (1958: §293), in a situation where each member of a given group of people has a box containing what each understands as a “beetle”, their description of the content of their boxes may vary, because no one knows what is in any box but their own. Each person's conception of the word 'beetle' only accords with the content of their box. The box, which is analogous to each person's mind, embodies personal experiences which cannot be known exactly by another. Yet, Wittgenstein argues that it is impossible to have a “private language” that would exclusively describe our private experiences to others since this would preclude objective understanding. Indeed, all we can discuss is what is available in our public language. For him, therefore, private language is an incoherent concept.

Although Wittgenstein acknowledges the possibility of immediate experiences, he insists that if ever they can be communicated and understood, it must be in public language since language is essentially public. For him, the use of words in language makes it public. This is so because the words must have public meaning or agreed meaning. Since someone else might understand the words of language, it is no longer private but public. For Wittgenstein (1958: §§243, 256, 269), therefore, our objects of experience are in the public domain and are understood as such. In his view, common judgement over common objects presupposes a common language. Hence, he concludes: “if language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgements” (Wittgenstein, 1958: §242).

### **SOLIPSISM AND THE PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT**

Epistemological solipsism and the private language argument have considerable implications for the knowledge of other minds. Solipsism, as a philosophical viewpoint, is also closely allied to philosophical skepticism and constitutes one of the spurs of Wittgenstein's argument against private language. Solipsism, from the Latin words “solus” (alone) and “ipse” (self), is the view that “I alone exist” (Russell, 1948:191). From the epistemological viewpoint, it is the doctrine that only my existence and my experience can be known for certain. Solipsism, therefore, fosters the claim that every human experience is characteristically personal and can only be expressed in a language that is exclusively private.

A number of philosophical arguments have been advanced with a view to demonstrating how untenable solipsism is as a philosophical doctrine. For instance, from the point of view of reality solipsism, which holds that the self is the totality of existence, Russell criticized solipsism as a dishonest and insincere hypothesis. Thus, he ridiculed the logician, Mrs. Christine Ladd-Franklin, who wrote to him saying that she was a solipsist. If she sincerely believed that only herself existed, then she would not have written to Russell who, by her belief, did not exist (Russell, 1948:196).

As already observed above, Wittgenstein's private language argument largely borders on the refutation of solipsism, which in turn constitutes a major springboard for the arguments in favour of private language. Against the backdrop that meanings reflect norms of usage, Wittgenstein argues that the very idea of “private language” is absurd. This implies that it is impossible to have a language whose meanings are accessible to only one person, that is, the

speaker of that language. According to him, a language intelligible to only one person would be impossible because it would be impossible for that speaker to establish the meanings of its putative signs. If a language were private, then the only way to establish meanings would be by some form of private ostension. But to establish a sign's meaning, something must impress upon the speaker a way of correctly using that sign in the future, or else the putative ostension is of no value. Wittgenstein (1958: §258) demonstrates this idea thus:

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 sign in a calendar for every day 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... Well, that is done precisely by the concentrating of attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connexion between the sign and the sensation. – But "I impress it on myself" can only mean this process brings it about that I remember the connexion *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about "right."

Wittgenstein sees epistemological solipsism as being totally grounded on the idea of the possibility of private language and private object of knowledge. That other people cannot know of my sensations, my feelings or my "sense-data", for him, is either wrong or non-sense, for to be able to talk of them at all in the language known to us commonly means that they are, at least to some extent, known to us. For the solipsist, the principal experience is the immediate private experience which cannot be shared with others. As such, the language that best describes such experience is a private language of the owner of this private experience. For Wittgenstein, the fact that the solipsist uses the public language in propounding solipsism renders it a defeated hypothesis. The possibility of talking about my sensations, my feelings or my "sense-data" in the language commonly known indicates that they are at least to some extent known to other people. Hence, he argues:

In what sense are my sensations *private*? – Well, only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it. – In one way this is wrong, and in another nonsense. If we are using the word "to know" as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know when I am in pain. Yes, but all the same not with the certainty with which I know it myself. – it can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean except perhaps that I *am* in pain (Wittgenstein, 1958: §246).

Wittgenstein's private-language argument also finds a formidable anchorage in his idea of "rule-following". He expresses the view that for an utterance to be meaningful it must be possible in principle to subject it to public standards and criteria of correctness. Consequently, a private language, understood as that in which "words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations," is not a genuine, meaningful, rule-governed language (Wittgenstein, 1958: §243). In fact, for Wittgenstein (1958: §261), the signs in language can only function when there is a possibility of judging the

correctness of their use; “so the use of a word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands.” Given that language is rule-based, Wittgenstein argues that it is completely public and not private. In his view, rules are public and in order to understand a word, sentence or proposition, one must understand the public rules which exist within any given language-game. Hence, any type of language considered to be a “private language” is actually determined by public rules and external reality. Describing the public nature of rules vis-à-vis language, he writes: “obeying a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence, it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately': otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it” (Wittgenstein, 1958: §202). Wittgenstein's discourse on private language culminates in the conclusion that the notion of private language is incoherent for it is not really a language at all. Inasmuch as there is a common language generally understood by the people about what we perceive, such as colours and what we feel, like 'pain', such objects are not private because they belong to our public language. Common language signifies common agreement which in turn comes from common judgment over common objects of knowledge; hence, Wittgenstein (1958: §242) argues that if language is to be a means of communication, there must be agreement not only in definition but also in judgments. Against the backdrop of his thesis that language is a common form of life, Wittgenstein insists that the idea of a private language presupposes a common and public language.

Still on the basis of his suppositions that there is no single, coherent “sample” or “object” that we call meaning and that meaning is a social event that happens between language users, Wittgenstein insists that it makes no sense to talk about a private language with words that have common meanings. In fact, he argues that one could not possibly *use* the word of a private language since one could have no criteria of the correctness of one's use of such word given that for a language to be used at all it must have some public criterion of identity. Hence, if something is a language, it *cannot* be logically private; and if something *is* private, it is not and cannot be a language (Wittgenstein, 1958: §§261-261).

With his private language argument, Wittgenstein succeeded at exposing the absurdity of skepticism and solipsism. As already observed, the private language argument basically aimed at saving human knowledge, beliefs and actions from sheer meaninglessness. With his novel ideas about the relationship between rules and language, Wittgenstein deepened and fortified the foundations of human knowledge, especially by highlighting the imperative of an objective standard for testing the correct use of linguistic expressions. The import of this idea, of course, finds more eloquent expression in his concept of language-game, with which he sought to analyze the multiplicity of linguistic practices in our ordinary language and to clarify the workings of language in general (Wittgenstein, 1958: §§7&23).

### **THE KNOWLEDGE OF OTHER MINDS: A REAL POSSIBILITY**

The immediate logical implication of Descartes' account of consciousness is that there can be no conceptual connection between the contents of a mind at a given time and the nature and/or behavior of the body in which it is located at that time. In other words, there is no logical connection between an individual's mental states and his physical actions or perceptible bodily language. This position, from Wittgenstein's perspective, is definitely arguable. For

him, the ascription of the notion of intelligibility and such psychological concepts or processes as consciousness, pain, anger, etc. to an object, presupposes the possession of a body. In other words, there is an *a priori* idea of a necessary link between the mental conditions and the behavioural dispositions of a body. Accordingly, Wittgenstein (1958: §281) writes, “Only of living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees, is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious.”

In spite of the stubborn lure to yield to the impossibility of the knowledge of other minds, the possibility of such knowledge remains real. B. Eboh (2003:144) associates the knowledge of other minds with man's capacity for auto-transcendence. For him, to rule out this possibility absolutely would amount to the denial of this potential. Man, as a knowing being, transcends himself and can interfere with other people's situations. Sometimes he uses his data of experience to compare, justify or balance his own state as well as evaluate others. Thus, one's experience constitutes a considerably reliable means of knowing other minds. This, of course, is the basis of the argument from analogy.

### **The Argument from analogy**

The argument from analogy, to a very large extent, favours the knowledge of other minds. As a process of reasoning, analogy is based on the similarity in the features of two given things. This argument follows the principle that if x is associated with y, then any phenomenon similar to x is very likely to be associated with y. Simply put, since what I know directly is the existence and contents of my own mind, it follows that my knowledge of the minds of others has to be indirect and analogical, an inference from my own case. Thornton (2001:4), on this, writes:

Observing that the bodies of other human beings behave as my body does in similar circumstances, I can, on this view, *infer* that the mental life and series of mental events which characteristically accompany my bodily behavior are also present in the case of others. Thus, for example, in my own case I see a problem which I am trying unsuccessfully to solve, I feel myself becoming frustrated, and I observe myself acting in a particular way. In the case of another I observe only the first and last terms of this three-term sequence, and on this basis I infer that the 'hidden' middle term, the feeling of frustration, has also occurred.

Remarkably, some reasonable objections have been raised against the argument from analogy especially on the grounds of the impossibility of checking the conclusion. The argument undoubtedly demonstrates an acceptance of the cartesian account of consciousness. It implies that my understanding of things derives from my own case, which, as a matter of fact, is not enough for generalization. The differences that are sometimes observed between my behavior and those of other people may be indicative of something different in other minds. My own case is, therefore, not always a sufficient ground for concluding that other bodies have mental predicates that are the exact equivalent of mine. Also, if I were to infer simply from my own case, as the argument from analogy holds, there would be no other operation that would serve as a check that my conclusion by analogy is correct. The criterion of correctness here must be

something independent of my impressions or my feelings, as Wittgenstein (1958: §265) would argue, for “justification consists in appealing to something independent.” The difficulties associated with the argument from analogy, notwithstanding, it still demonstrates that the other minds can be known to some extent.

### **Behaviourism**

Behaviourism, understood as the theory that human and animal psychology, thoughts and feelings can be objectively studied through observable actions or behavior, also supports the knowledge of other minds. As a predominant psychological theory of the 1900s, behaviourism de-emphasizes conscious mental processes in learning, as promoted by *structuralism* and *functionalism* as well as the Freudian notions about unconscious influences. It rather emphasizes psychological investigations strictly based on overt behavior. Emerging from the pioneering works of the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) and advanced by the works of J.B. Watson (1878-1958) and B.F. Skinner (1904-1990), behaviourism focuses on observable behaviours that could be objectively measured and verified.

Since its emergence in the 1900s behaviourism has featured some subtle variations as expressed in Edward Thorndike's *law of effect*, John B. Watson's *methodological behaviourism*, B. F. Skinner's *radical behaviourism* and *operant conditioning*, Watson and Pavlov's *classical conditioning*, Skinner's *operant conditioning*, Arthur W. Staats' *psychological behaviorism*, Howard Rachlin's *teleological behaviourism*, J.E.R. Staddon's *Theoretical behaviourism*, etc. Generally, these behaviourist theories consider behavior as something open to public consideration in the project of accessing and assessing mental states. For the behaviourist, therefore, a person's behavior, his observable bodily gestures, and his countenance, constitute gateways to his mental state or disposition.

The insights of most behaviourists essentially accord with the stance of this discourse, that there is an apparent correlation between inner experiences and their corresponding external or observable manifestations. An understanding of a person's external gesture, therefore, can afford a considerable knowledge of his or her state of mind or mental state. It is often the case that one who is happy puts on cheerful facial looks; one who is angry or in pain, on the other hand, is likely to frown. Similarly, hunger, fatigue, and ill health are naturally associated with yawning, feeling sleepy, and looking pale, respectively. Although the possibility of wrong inference or deceitful appearance can affect the reliability of knowledge acquired by means of overt behavior, it still affords some considerable knowledge under normal circumstances.

### **Intuition**

Intuition, understood as the ability of immediate understanding of situations or people's feelings without conscious reasoning or studying, is also considered a possible means of knowing other minds. Although immediate intuitive apprehension is uncommon, instances of its occurrence still abound. In the light of his contention that the modes of thought and the apprehension of reality are hierarchically graded according to the nature of the objects with which they are concerned, Plato (1968: Book, VI, 509c-511d) divides the realm of knowledge into “the visible world” and “the intelligible world.” According to him, in the visible world,

imagination (*eikasia*), which deals with shadows, pictures and images, is at the bottom of the ladder; it is followed by belief (*pistis*), which deals with ordinary physical objects and provides the most accurate conception of nature and relationship of temporal things. In the intelligible world, understanding (*dianoia*), avails us of a systematic knowledge of simple forms of numbers and mathematical objects. The highest mode of thought, for Plato, is intuition (*noesis*), which deals with the more significant forms, including Equality, Beauty, Truth, and The Good. For him, therefore, intuition is a fundamental capacity of human reason to comprehend the true nature of reality.

Strongly arguing that intuitive knowledge is possible, Descartes (1998:63-69), in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, avers that our minds naturally possess two powers, which he considers most certain routes to knowledge, namely, *intuition* and *deduction*. According to him, these are mental powers by which we are able entirely without fear of illusion, to arrive at the knowledge of things through reasoning and contemplation. Immanuel Kant (1998:155-171), on the other hand, considers intuition a basic sensory information provided by the cognitive faculty of sensibility. For Kant, our mind casts all of our external intuitions in the form of space, and all of our internal intuitions (memory, thought) in the form of time.

The present discourse shares the view of Francis P. Cholle on the compatibility of intuitive awareness or instinctual impulses with reason and scientific logic. Describing the nature of intuition and its consideration as a tenable means of knowledge acquisition, Cholle (2011:1-2) refers to it as a sensation that appears quickly in consciousness (noticeable enough to be acted on if one chooses to) without us being fully aware of the underlying reasons for its occurrence. According to him, the process of intuition bridges the gap between the conscious and the nonconscious parts of the mind, and also between instinct and reason. He argues that while the conscious mind is an expert at logic and will use it relentlessly, the unconscious mind searches through the past, the present, and the future, as well as connects with hunches and feelings in nonlinear way. The process, according to him, is cryptic to the logical mind, as it defies the conventional laws of time and space. Arguing, therefore, that we don't have to reject scientific logic in order to benefit from instinct, he concludes that we need both instinct and reason to make the best possible decisions for ourselves, our businesses, and our families.

### **Telepathy**

Closely allied to the power of intuitive apprehension is the paranormal phenomenon, telepathy. Telepathy, (From the Greek 'tele' meaning 'distant' and 'pathos' or 'patheia' meaning 'feeling, perception, passion, affliction, experience'), is the purported vicarious transmission of information from one person to another without using any known human sensory channels or physical interaction (*Collins Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> Edition). In other words, it is the communication of thoughts or feelings from one mind to another without the normal use of the senses (Hornby, 1995:1227). Telepathy, as one of the instances of extra-sensory perception (ESP) correlates with such phenomena as mind reading, thought transference, clairvoyance, sixth sense, and psychometry.

In their landmark research work, *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*, Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder documented numerous instances of telepathic experiences,

relying especially on their prevalence in the former U.S.S.R. Ostrander and Schroeder (1970:17-18) observed, that in the 1960s, a good number of Soviet publications including journals and magazines investigated the psychic phenomena. In 1966, for instance, the influential journal *Science and Religion* put a special issue No. 3 on current Russian telepathy research. In response to the call for further scientific investigation of telepathy, their work extensively explored the psychic dimension of human experience with its scientific, political, cultural, and philosophical implications. The numerous concrete cases reported in their work bear eloquent testimony to the reality of telepathy.

Although the phenomenon of telepathy may lack satisfactory scientific explanation, common human experiences testify to its occurrence. The knowledge gotten from telepathy may be vague or clear, simple or detailed. The experience can last for only a few minutes or just a flash. Also, telepathic experience may take a visual form, the form of sound or a voice. Notably, too, common experiences indicate that telepathy is more likely to be successful between two people who know and trust each other than between strangers, between two who are friendly and have a good deal in common than between two unfriendly persons.

#### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF OTHER MINDS FOR INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND THE CONTEMPORARY HUMAN SOCIETY**

As a social being, man habitually shares common values and judgments as well as attempts at reaching understanding with his fellow men. The solipsistic world outlook is, therefore, at variance with man's ontological constitution. Living in a world replete with public objects and populated by other human beings, man's experiences cannot be altogether private. Indeed, even human concepts are acquired in a specifically intersubjective, social, and linguistic context. For Wittgenstein, human endeavours are captured in man's use of language, which he considers a public reality. This, at least in part, is the import of his assertion, "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world." (Wittgenstein, 1922: 5.62). From this perspective, therefore, language as a public phenomenon, plays a pivotal role in interpersonal relationships and the human society at large.

In his work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke addresses some fundamental questions about how we think and perceive, as well as how we express ourselves through language, logic, and religious practices. The work features an attempt to refute the rationalist notion of innate ideas or nativism as it presupposes that the human mind is a blank slate (*tabula rasa*) on which experience writes. In fact, it is considered one of the principal sources of empiricism in modern philosophy, given its influence on many enlightenment philosophers like David Hume and George Berkeley. Similar to Wittgenstein's insights on words, signs and symbols, as expressed in his "picture theory", Locke (1825:291) connects words to the ideas they signify, claiming that man is unique in being able to frame sounds into distinct words and to signify ideas by those words. Hence, he avers, "words are sensible marks of ideas; and the ideas they stand for are their proper and immediate signification. Locke (1825:291-294) criticizes metaphysicians for making up new words that have no clear meaning. He also criticizes the use of words which are not linked to clear ideas, and those who change the criteria or meaning underlying a term. He believes that obscurity is caused by philosophers who, to confuse their readers, invoke old terms and give them unexpected

meanings or who construct new terms without clearly defining their intent. Locke's critique of metaphysics parallels that of Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*. With his concept of language-game Wittgenstein attempts to rid words of their metaphysical garb with a view to ensuring clarity.

Bertrand Russell, in his work, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, also investigates the foundations and justifications of human knowledge especially in relation to the individual and the society. Russell (1948:17) maintains that language, our sole means of communicating scientific knowledge, is essentially social in its origin and in its main functions. While acknowledging the possible import of a private language, for instance, that of an individual who intends to conceal certain things from all eyes but his own in his diary, he insists that “the chief purpose of language is communication, and to serve this purpose it must be public, not a private dialect invented by the speaker.” For Russell, therefore, a person's inner state could have external manifestation in language in all its expressive forms.

Remarkably, Wittgenstein's idea that language is a form of activity and a “form of life” is a fundamental element in his discourse on private language and has obvious implications for intersubjectivity. His assertion that “to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life” (Wittgenstein, 1958: §19), culminates in his associating language with such behavioral and cognitive forms of life as giving orders and obeying them, describing the appearance of an object or giving its measurements, reporting an event, speculating about an event, as well as playing, acting, singing, making a joke, solving a problem, asking, thinking, cursing, greeting, praying, etc. (Wittgenstein, 1958: §23). Articulating the essence of Wittgenstein's idea of “a form of life”, therefore, Schulte (1992:108) avers that, for Wittgenstein, it simply means the entirety of the practices of a linguistic community.

The import of Wittgenstein's insight above is that by means of language, as an institutionalized activity, we make ourselves understood; we motivate one another reciprocally and engage in action. One, therefore, can hardly posit actions that are absolutely solitary. There is only action in common; hence, language is the communal life-praxis of men. For Wittgenstein (1958: §491), “without language we could not communicate with one another. – But for sure: without language we cannot influence other people in such-and-such ways; cannot build roads and machines, etc. And also: without the use of speech and writing people could not communicate.” The essence of linguistic communication, then, is not just the transmission of information but coming to understanding within the matrix of communal action (Wittgenstein, 1958: §363). On the stress of the fact that Wittgenstein's stand on the public nature of language has implications for interpersonal relationships among rational and conscious beings, Thornton (2001:7) concludes:

The intersubjective world in which we live with other human beings, the public language-system which we must master if we are to think at all, these are the primary data, the 'proto-phenomena', in Wittgenstein's phrase (PI. §654) – our psychological and non-psychological concepts alike are derived from a single linguistic fountainhead. It is precisely because the living human being functions as our paradigm of that which is conscious and has a mental life that we find the solipsistic notion that other human beings could be

'automations', machines devoid of any conscious thought or experience, bizarre and bewildering; the idea that other persons might all in reality be 'automatons' is not one which we can seriously entertain.

In essence, a conscious effort at deciphering the internal disposition of people is essential to fostering a cordial relationship with them. The doctor tries to understand the fears and the hopes of his patient; the teacher seeks to read the mind of his student in order to ensure efficiency in the teaching and learning process; religious and political leaders seek to understand the feelings and the problems of their followers and subjects in order to address their problems and difficulties appropriately. The knowledge of other mind is, therefore, not only a relevant feature of the contemporary human society but also makes for a more fruitful social interaction.

### CONCLUSION

The above investigation into the possibility and various means of knowing other minds as well as the arguments against them, bring a point to the fore, namely, that at least to some extent, the other mind is knowable. Obviously, such factors as illusion, deceit, exaggeration or wrong interpretation could distort the full knowledge of the inner states or conditions of other minds through their external manifestations. While a person's mental states, feelings, thoughts, desires, and emotions may not be known exactly as the possessor, such mental states, to a very reasonable extent, remain accessible to others through behavioural and linguistic expressions or verbal and non-verbal gestures. The degree of the knowledge of other mind is, therefore, dependent on the extent to which the other's mental state is genuinely expressed and reasonably comprehended.

**Certainly, some** immediate and individual experiences may not be sufficiently and adequately captured in public language. This suggests the possibility of having at least some private elements of language. Hence, leveraging on the idea that thoughts have language-like or compositional structure, Jerry Fodor (1975:214), in his "Language of thought hypothesis", otherwise referred to as "thought ordered mental expression," argues for the existence of a "private language." However, the fact that language is ideally and predominantly a public medium of expression, lends credence to the possibility of knowing other minds. By means of words and actions, therefore, man gains considerable knowledge of the mental states of others.

The knowledge of other mind plays a considerable role in the advancement man's interpersonal relationship, whether they are political, social, religious, or otherwise. Man's intrinsically social nature makes it impossible for him to find fulfillment in solitary life; he cannot live authentically in isolation. Man necessarily associates with his fellow men in the society in which he lives especially by means of language. Little wonder, Wittgenstein, highlighting the dynamic nature of language and the wide-range of possibilities with regard to human activities and experiences, insists that language is a "form of life" (Wittgenstein, 1958: §19). The knowledge of other minds, therefore, enhances mutual understanding, effects growth of human knowledge, and facilitates social, political, economic, and religious interactions in the human society.

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