4.1 WITTGENSTEIN AND OTHER MINDS

Before delving further into the question of and probable solution for the problem of other minds, it shall be worthwhile to stop here and recount the broad contentions so far discussed in this research. The question itself arises from the skeptical doubt regarding the possibility of us knowing a mind other than our own. The inductionists have tried to solve the problem through bodily analogy, but beyond a point this fails to establish the necessary correlation between mind and body. The physicalists have tried to establish this correlation from their own points of view but beyond a point even that argument is not particularly helpful. Then it has been probed whether the scope of the definition of the word ‘knowledge’ itself should be expanded as far as
‘knowing’ other minds is concerned. While discussing that, it has been seen how an individual cannot exist in isolation but rather, need to fit into a socio-cultural milieu within which he communicates with fellow beings. This gives birth to a pertinent question. What if the problem regarding other minds is fundamentally a linguistic problem? Perhaps it is the result of misunderstanding the subtleties of language. Wittgenstein, in Philosophical Investigation, definitely thinks so.

The viewpoint that Wittgenstein expresses in Philosophical Investigation in support of other minds rests on the theory of public language. Here Wittgenstein makes a sharp distinction between a private language and a public language, stripping the former of the status of a language. The general flow of the argument proposed by Wittgenstein is as follows: thought is not possible without language; and language can never be private, as we cannot use language without
already laid down publicly accepted rules for the grammar of that
language, that provides with the correct use of the expression. This
shared public language, Wittgenstein holds, bridges the gap between
“I” and “we” making communication possible.

Wittgenstein holds that language is nothing but the teaching and
learning of sounds the meaning of which is fixed conventionally.

Wittgenstein writes, “let us imagine a language...The language is
meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an
assistant B. A is building with building stones; there are blocks,
pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order
in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language
consisting of the words “block”, “pillar”, “slab”, “beam”. A calls them
out; - B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such
a call. – Conceive this as a complete primitive language.”xxx

This language game, however, gets complicated and might be slightly different in different cultures. But one has to know the rules of the game beforehand otherwise he will not be able to play the game – in the like manner as when someone shows another the King in the chess and says “this is the king”, even then he will not be able to use the ‘King’ unless he already knows the rules. Like this one, each language game has its own unique set of rules and there are different rules for interpreting words in different language games.

Wittgenstein, in Philosophical Investigations, has shown that the construction of a language that no one but the creator can use and understand is impossible. A ‘private language’, it being a language nonetheless, must have publicly checkable rules. But being private in
nature, it will not be possible for it to have publicly checkable rules, and hence such a language is self-contradictory in nature. Let us make the point clear with the help of an example after Wittgenstein himself.

Suppose one day I had a sensation ‘X’ that I termed as pain. The next day I have a sensation ‘Y’ that to me seems exactly identical with ‘X’.

So this one too I name as ‘pain’. But the question is what evidence do I have to term both the sensations ‘X’ and ‘Y’ as pain? I might answer, “Why, I clearly remember the sensation ‘X’ and feel that ‘Y’ is identical with ‘X’”. But is it not possible that my memory is playing a trick and I am wrongly identifying ‘Y’ with ‘X’? ‘X’ and ‘Y’ might be identical, or they might not be. So here the evidence of ‘X’ and ‘Y’ being identical is nothing more than my believing them to be so. But ‘my believing them to be identical’ cannot prove them to be identical. So the validity of the statement, namely, that ‘X’ is identical
with ‘Y’ depends on some criterion of correctness other than my holding them to be correct. Because if that is the case then we will have to accept the absurd proposition that ‘I have no criterion of correctness but whatever seems right to me is right’. “And that only means that here we can’t talk about right.” Right or wrong usage of a word depends on the criterion that is fixed by the convention accepted by the people who use the language. If we use the word ‘chair’ in the sentence ‘sit on a chair’ and correctly so, then it is because of the fact that it is a part of the grammar of the word ‘chair’ that this is what we call ‘to sit on a chair’. Therefore, the use of a word in a language game must be governed by publicly checkable rules. These rules, by virtue of being rules, are sharable and capable of being followed by the members or participants of a language game. Language can be private only in the sense in which I can have a private sewing
machine. To be a private sewing machine it must be a sewing machine first. We can very well write down our feelings, moods and inner experiences but they are always written in public language. So here Wittgenstein rejects the Cartesian theory that our mental states are absolutely private in the sense that only we have principal access to our mental states and processes, nobody else can share or know of such knowledge and hence they are extremely private in nature that only reveal themselves to introspection. Wittgenstein holds that the whole idea of Descartes and his followers or a section of the critiques, namely, the skeptics, stands upon the asymmetry between the first and the third person psychological statements. But if I have a mental language for sensation then as I am sharing the language with others my sensation statement is not a private one. When I say ‘I am in pain’ the hearer perfectly understands the meaning of the sentence and
thereby I successfully convey my thoughts as both of us belong to a particular language game and as we have seen that language is nothing but the teaching and learning of sounds, the meaning of which is conventionally fixed. If I go to a foreign land where nobody knows English and plays a language game absolutely alien to me then my uttering of the sentence ‘I am in pain’ will convey nothing to the hearer because the word ‘pain’ has no use in that language. Language game is somewhat different in different cultures. The meanings of the words must be shared between the speaker and the hearer if successful communication is to be ensured. Grasping an explanation of meaning and knowing how to use the word are two factors of one and the same ability. Understanding a language, according to Wittgenstein, is not a mental state but rather a capacity or an array of capacities to employ symbols in accordance with the rules in various speech activities. The
use of a word is a skill and not an experience. So far we have seen that Wittgenstein has discarded non-linguistic thoughts. But can there be any pre-linguistic thoughts? The baby who has not learned the language can successfully communicate its thoughts through behavior like crying, laughing etc. Will it be prudent to say that when pricked by a pin it feels nothing in the absence of language? Wittgenstein of course does not hold such absurdity. He thinks these reactions to be primitive and holds that a new behavior replaces it when the child learns the linguistic expressions of such primitive behavior. “Surely this way of behaving is pre-linguistic: that a language game is based on it, that it is the prototype of a way of thinking and not the result of thinking” Our language game is an extension of primitive behavior. New pain behavior is learned when a child learns linguistic
expressions of pain, the criterion for correctness or incorrectness of
the use of which is absolutely public.

So far Wittgenstein has come to the conclusion that the rules of
language should be very much public to make language the mode of
communication. Now, at least two persons are needed in a language
situation to make successful communication possible – one speaker
and one listener or the interpreter. The hearer considers the speaker to
be correct only when he can successfully interpret what the speaker is
saying. If both the speaker and the hearer belong to the same
linguistic framework then they might not agree upon what is being
said or the correctness or incorrectness of the propositions uttered but
they would surely be able to understand the meaning of what is being
said because both of them are following the same publicly available
linguistic rules thus making the skeptical claim of non-understanding of second person utterances like ‘I am in pain’ absolutely nullified. So when somebody other than me says ‘I am in pain’ I perfectly understand what he says thus making communication between us possible.

It might be argued that knowing of the meaning of a statement does not depend solely on sharing the same language game that contains public rules, as some sort of subjectivity is always involved in a speaker-hearer situation. Let us take the sentence ‘she is Indian’. This sentence conveys different meanings depending on what the speaker intends to mean; his intention, feelings, wishes etc. are to be taken into account to make successful interpretation possible. Love, hatred, anger, patriotism, or any other emotion can change the meaning of the
same sentence. So we should take into account not only the conventional linguistic meaning but ‘intended speaker meaning’ as well. Wittgenstein, presumably, was aware of this when he wrote that we presuppose a great deal of stage setting without which the act of naming makes no sense. He further says, “One human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country’s language. We do not understand the people…We cannot find our feet with them.” 

Therefore, when Wittgenstein is speaking of language game he probably did not forget the socio-cultural milieu but kept it as a backdrop.
4.2 OBJECT DROPPED

Now, let us take a close look at the problem of knowing other minds.

Let us accept for the moment that every language has its own set of rules that are absolutely public in nature and by virtue of this helps people to understand the utterances of other beings. But does this set of rules ensure the truth of the sentence uttered? When a second person says ‘I am in pain’ how do I know that he is speaking the truth? Because he himself is the only person who has privileged access to his inner mental states and therefore he alone is in the position of knowing the truth of the proposition ‘I am in pain’. If I have thought or feel an emotion, see a scene, I am certain that I am feeling, seeing or thinking. But can this also hold true for the others, because they are they and I am I? We have already seen that it would be presumptuous to say that X’s behavior is evidence for his feelings.
I might say that ‘X’ is in pain because he behaves the way I behave when I feel pain. But that too will be presumptuous as I do not know how ‘X’ feels inside.

Here we should make a distinction between epistemic privacy and the privacy of ownership. Something is epistemically private if only one person can know it, whereas it is private in the second sense if only he can have it. “Wittgenstein’s’ attack is launched at the very heart of the private-linguist’s conception, namely at the supposition that he himself understands his ‘private’ language, that the putative words of this alleged language are at any rate obviously intelligible to himself.”

No such private language is possible even in case of first person ownership of sensations. ‘Private language’ is self contradictory in nature. Even our own sensations cannot be in private language as, if
they are linguistic in nature they cannot be e-private and if they are e-private they are non-linguistic in nature implying thereby that they are not thinkable in nature. In that case even the owner of sensation will not be in a position to talk about it. I cannot say, not even able to think rationally the proposition ‘I am in pain’. Therefore, what I would have then is non-linguistic, raw sensation that cannot be the subject of any type of discussion or discourse. Moreover, it will even not be justified to say that ‘I know that I am in pain’ (as I only am certain about my pain ‘a la’ skeptics) because such prepositional knowledge requires language and in lieu of language I will not be able to know my feelings and sensations. Of course I might feel something but that, borrowing Kant’s terminology, would be unknown and unknowable. So the logical conclusion of this whole episode would be to keep
silent about non-linguistic mere sensations, for language is the only tool that breaks this silence.

A non-linguistic world is a mute world. In that world what we may have are certain nameless ‘private objects’ that are referred to as ‘sensations’ in the common language.

Now if I claim that it is only from my own case and my own experience that I know what the word pain means then I must also say, according to Wittgenstein, that others only know what ‘pain’ means from their own experience. Wittgenstein has conceived of a situation where people do succeed in communicating with each other.

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

Therefore, Wittgenstein’s aim is to show that private objects like sensation plays no role in the mechanism of communication, they are
like idle machinery, for if they were to play a part then communication would not be possible.

Wittgenstein remarks that the proposition ‘sensations are private’ is comparable to the proposition ‘One plays patience by oneself’. As the second proposition does not reveal any information about the members of card playing societies or the societies themselves but only about some rules of the game to the effect that it makes sense to say ‘A plays patience when he was alone’ but not ‘A played patience against B’. If A wins playing patience against B then either the proposition that describes the situation is meaningless or the card game here referred to is not ‘patience’. Sensation words like ‘pain’, if used in our public language, are about some linguistic rules to the effect that it makes sense to say the propositions ‘I am in pain’, ‘He is
in pain’ etc. On the other hand if sensation words refer to something private then they are incommunicable and thereby should remain beyond the scope of our communication system. We cannot talk about them. In order to know whether another person is in pain, what we need is not a sensation of pain but the concept pain. Search for private sensation is nothing but delusory because if a thought is private it is de facto unknown to others as it cannot be revealed or manifested. Therefore it is often said that the metaphysics of privacy is a story of shadow boxing in the dark, nothing but a bizarre tale of self-delusion. Wittgenstein further holds that the first person sensation statements like ‘I am having a toothache’ are not epistemic propositions, as here the subject is not making any epistemic claim at all. The proposition ‘I know that I am having a toothache’ is redundant and non-epistemic at the same time. My ‘pain’ can never be the subject of my epistemic
proposition. Any proposition, like ‘I know I am in pain’ has got no sense, because the proposition ‘I know I am in pain’ would be meaningful if the proposition, ‘I do not know that I am in pain’ is also meaningful. But the proposition ‘I do not know that I am in pain’ is not only un-meaningful, but also ridiculously absurd. So what I feel (i.e. the private sensation) cannot be expressed as a ‘knowing that’. So “I have pain” is no more a statement about a particular person than a moaning is”\textsuperscript{*ix}. Hence ‘I know I am in pain’ is a nonsensical proposition. I do not know my pain, but rather I feel it. Hereby Wittgenstein tries to eliminate the asymmetry shown by the skeptics between the first and the third person sensation statements. What it amounts to is that, the third person psychological statements are able to make knowledge claims whereas the first person statements cannot make any knowledge claims as they are mere replacement or
substitution of certain behaviors. A true sentence in the third person mode that ascribes a sensation to someone transmits some information whereas a true sentence in the first person is akin to an expression of sensation.

What Wittgenstein shows is that the correct first person use of names of sensations is not dependent upon the correct identification of events the nature of which is inaccessible to others. If ‘my pain’ is different from ‘your pain’ even if I do not feel anything at all we can always speak in a shared language where the word ‘pain’ has some use. "The understanding of names of sensations in a shared language is in no way governed by what is true of the world of private objects: it does not matter whether different individuals use such a name privately to designate the same or different private objects or to designate nothing at all, and it does not matter whether any individual’s private use is
frequently incorrect by the standard supposedly laid down by his private ostensive definition. As far as a public language in concerned, incorrect inner use is just as good as correct inner use, and identity of inner use by individuals no better than difference.\textsuperscript{xii}

Thus Wittgenstein has tried not to solve the problem but to dissolve it. He has tried to achieve this goal by rejecting ‘object and name’ as the right model for the grammar of the expression of sensation. The word ‘pain’ has a use and therefore according to Wittgenstein, it is not ‘nothing’ but as it is not the name of a private object of internal awareness it is not a ‘something’ either. It is rather a something about which Wittgenstein holds, nothing can be said.

The next section discusses how far this claim of Wittgenstein is logically correct.
4.3 CRITICAL APPRAISAL

We have already discussed how Wittgenstein is not concerned with the way our sensation words function in our language game. He holds that an inner process stands in need for an outward criterion. The outward expression of a sensation like ‘pain’, he holds, is groaning, moaning etc. Is he then a behaviorist? Wittgenstein’s answer is in negative. If so, then does he believe in an ‘inner process’ of which behavior is an outward expression? Wittgenstein’s use of the word ‘inner process’ definitely suggests this. Then what is this inner process? Is it sensation? No straightforward answer can be found in the Philosophical Investigation. He further says that if we construe the grammar of the expression sensation on the model of ‘object and designation’ the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant. But
the million-dollar question is can ‘object’ ever be dropped out of consideration as irrelevant, as Wittgenstein has expounded? If not, then why has he been so keen on disposing it of as irrelevant? The second question is taken up and addressed first.

Wittgenstein, as Philosophical Investigation suggests, was never comfortable with the threat posed by the skeptics in the form of asymmetry between the first person and the third person statements that were caused by the privileged access that the first person has to sensations. But in this eager anticipation is he not abandoning the existence and relevance of something that we all do experience? When we use the word ‘pain’ either in first person or in third person statements do we not refer to the sensation that is an extremely unpleasant sensation? And is it not the sensation itself that we care
about and wish to communicate? Therefore, when Wittgenstein says that object should be dropped from the object-designation model, it becomes a hard pill to swallow. The beetle-box analogy tries to show that our language does not have the tools to talk about mental states.

But is not our language flexible enough to interact with both the shared criteria of the publicly observable world and the shared criteria of our private yet congruent experimental lives? We can and do communicate our sensations through the sensation terms the meaning of which do not lie in a private language. ‘Sensation’ is the name for sensation. A name gets its meaning from the thing or the sort of things it names. Therefore when we have a name (pain, joy etc.) in our language there must be some publicly checkable rules for their proper use. ‘Pain’ behavior, for example, enables us to talk about the ‘inner process’ i.e. ‘pain sensation’ in our public language. Our elders have
taught us the use and meaning of the word pain when I was in pain, though they did not and could not feel ‘my’ pain. They taught me that pain is the name for the sensation that goes with injuries and pain behavior. Wounds, pain behavior and the like provide the public outward criteria by which we determine whether or not a sensation is pain sensation. If a person says he is in pain while laughing chatting, dancing and showing no sign of pain behavior then he is not in pain but is using the word ‘pain’ in the wrong context; or in other words he is not using the word pain at all, as the incorrect use of a word does not qualify as usage. Even the ‘super Spartan’ of Hilary Putnam cannot suppress each and every sign of pain behavior while really in pain. If he does not show any outward criterion of pain, then it is only logical to hold that he is not in pain, or in other words, he is not feeling any pain even though the pain inducing circumstances are
present. Therefore ‘outward criteria’ do definitely refer to some ‘inner process’. Pain is private in the sense that only one person can feel it but it is not private object in the sense that only one person can know it.

The beetle in the box analogy shows that the nature of the object can differ from box to box but that has no effect on the usage of the term ‘beetle’ in a particular language because ‘beetle’ is the name for ‘whatever is in the box’ as ‘pain’ is the generic name for the way we behave and/or make utterances in a particular situation. But if the object in the box varies from person to person is it not also possible that the box might as well be empty? Don Locke, in his famous book ‘Myself And Others’ argued against this. He thinks that the box cannot be empty, because if the ‘box’ was empty then the one who has nothing in the ‘box’ would naturally retort ‘But there isn’t anything in
my box’ when he is told to look at his box. But this argument doesn’t seem to be convincing because the person who has an empty box would react in this way if he takes ‘beetle’ to stand for emptiness. Or it is also possible that he took the coloring or decoration of the interior part of the box to be beetle and thus nods in agreement to the statement ‘there is a beetle in the box’. Therefore, to judge the truth or falsity of a statement like this, the prior knowledge of the beetle is necessary. But Don Locke, I think, is right in holding that if the grammar of the expression of sensation is construed on the model of ‘object and name’, the object drops out as irrelevant only in the sense that it does not matter what the object is like in itself. So pain has a private reference but that does not mean we cannot talk about it in a public language. We can know pain without feeling it. Wittgenstein, like the skeptics, failed to distinguish between the claims that
sensations are things that one person can feel from the claim that they are things only one person can know. Both the skeptics and Wittgenstein made the blunder in thinking that the latter follows from the former, though in different ways. Wittgenstein’s eagerness to brush away ‘sensation’ has probably generated from the inherent anxiety to do away with the Cartesian ghost, the thought that once he allows sensation a foothold it would lead to solipsism. But it is not necessarily the case. Sensations become private to dualists because they put them in a separate category named mental substances that are private and inaccessible to others. But we have seen in the last chapter that I am privileged and unique not because I have the sole access to some kind of non-physical substance called mental states but because of the kind of brain that I have. Brain being the substance that it is, when stimulated responds in a particular way which we call sensation.
Therefore, sensation is a publicly observable non-private neuro-physical event. If we could keep a human brain alive in vitro, we would be able to make it perceive things or feel pain etc by the use of suitable electrodes applied at the appropriate parts of it. According to Paul Ziff, sensations are brain processes no less than water is H2O. So we can know of the existence of sensations by observing the brain states with the help of different methods offered by the neuro-physical sciences. But that is definitely not how we usually know them. We usually know them by their bodily behavior and linguistic usage but that does not make the sensations non-existent in nature. Actually speaking, the whole issue of the other minds arises within the framework of verbal and other forms of communications. If we were like windowless monads God being dead, no query or question regarding other minds would have arisen at all. The problem
regarding the knowledge of other minds arise within a socio-linguistic framework but that does not nullify the ontological status of the sensations that are in the very core of consciousness. Knowing other minds is not only to know their behavior but also to know sensations or mental states through it. Just as to the question ‘how do I marry money?’ the only conceivable answer is ‘by marrying a rich person’ and not ‘marrying a person plus marrying money’, to the question ‘how do I observe mental states’ the answer is ‘via observation of behavior and verbal utterances’ and not ‘by observing behavior plus introspecting and inferring mental states’. Therefore, there are no two sets of objects but sensations and neuro-physical states are two sides of the same coin. Ontologically speaking, then, other minds are nothing more than the other brain or neuro-physical states to be more precise. So I do not think that sensation should be dropped from the
object designator formula anymore. The feelings of sensation might vary from person to person but if we do not lie or pretend then it is rarely possible for the box to be empty. When I cry, moan, groan or say ‘I am in pain’ I do wish to convey my unpleasant sensation or a cluster of unpleasant sensations through this behavior and linguistic expression. If privacy means ‘susceptibility to privileged access’ then sensations are ontologically private no doubt but contemporary neuro science does not allow them to remain ‘private’ any more. Moreover, ownership privacy does not imply epistemic privacy. Sensations have a way to make a place in our language game; they are not incommunicable and hence epistemologically not private in nature.