CONCLUSION

We never do seriously believe that we are unique in having a consciousness, which is an accidental property that has been bestowed upon us by sheer chance factor. We do not think that our spouses, parents, children, friends and foes, all are nothing more than walking, talking entities devoid of consciousness. They cannot feel, neither can they will, think or have any kind of mental states and processes. Rather we do believe that they are, like me, no less than conscious beings. When I tell a joke to my friend and she laughs, I do not doubt her understanding of the punch line. I do not think for a moment that her laughter is not prompted by a conscious understanding but is a mere mechanical opening of mouth in a particular way while making a particular type of sound that is totally devoid of consciousness. But
when the skeptics ask for the rationale behind such a belief we find ourselves facing a puzzle. I know that my daughter Tia is angry. If instead she were dancing then in response to a person’s query regarding the veracity of my knowledge on the fact that she is dancing I could have replied, “By seeing, of course”. So when the skeptics ask a question like “How do you know that Tia is angry?” I might answer in like manner (“By seeing, of course”). But do I ‘see’ Tia to be angry in the same way as I see Tia to be dancing? Am I not implying, rather, that I believe her to be angry? In other words, the crucial questions forwarded by the skeptics are:

(i) Do you know she is?

(ii) How do you know that she is?
I try to corroborate it with some evidence that would support my belief that she is angry. I might answer by saying that her facial expression takes a particular look, she is behaving in a particular manner, her voice has a certain pitch etc, which inform me of her anger. All these propositions act as corroborative evidences in support of my belief that Tia is angry. The skeptics then go on to ask, “Fine, but are you sure that she is angry?” In other words, how can you know if her anger is genuine or phony?

It is known that the metaphysicians, when told, “I see a table” often ask questions, such as, “Is the table a real table?” But as long as they are not specifying what may be wrong with a proposition like “I see a table” or “there is a table in front of me”, we are at a loss on how to prove it as a real one. We do not understand what is meant by the
‘real’ that they are so eagerly seeking. Probably they are asking for some corroborative evidence in favor of its existence. But according to the skeptics, in the case of a mental state such as anger or pain such evidence cannot be found as I do not have the privileged access to another individual’s mental states and processes. The researcher does not agree with this point of view. Direct awareness is not the only source of knowledge. Neither is it necessary for knowledge to prove infallible on every occasion.

What is believed to be true at some point of time might later emerge as untrue. The possibility of us being mistaken is an omnipresent one, but that in itself does not make knowledge an impossible term. It has already been noted in a previous chapter that the fact that machines are liable to break down does not by itself prevent us from using
them; neither does the fact that promises are liable to be broken
dissuade us from making them in the first place. By the same analogy,
the possibility of making a mistake poses no hindrance to my knowing
that Tia is angry. My not knowing whether Tia is angry on one or two
occasions does not prove that I can never know whether she is angry.

When I make a statement like, ‘He is in pain’, then that knowledge
requires on my part some background information like (at least
theoretical) acquaintance with the cultural expression of that person. If
I am not acquainted with the ‘Spartan’ culture in any which way, then
I shall never be able to understand the ‘Spartan pain’. If we are not
familiar with the character, mannerism or culture of a particular
person, we hesitate to put forward any knowledge claims regarding
that individual.
Some linguists have argued that knowing of the meaning of a statement depends solely on sharing the same language game that contains public rules alone. While accepting the basic premises of this proposition, the researcher would nonetheless like to add a rider to it. Some sort of subjectivity is always involved in a speaker-hearer situation. A sentence conveys different meanings depending on what the speaker intends to mean. His intentions, feelings, wishes etc. are to be taken into account to make successful interpretation possible. Love, hatred, anger, or any other emotion may change the meaning of a particular sentence. Therefore, along with the conventional linguistic meaning, the intended speaker meaning needs to be taken into account. It should also be noted that interpretation is a two-way relationship. The meaning of an utterance does not only depend on the
intention of the speaker but also on the intention of the speaker as translated by the hearer.

Thus looking at the problem from different angles the researcher has arrived to the conclusion that the key to the solution of the problem regarding the knowledge of other minds does not lie in answering the skeptical doubts because absolute certainty of knowledge that the skeptics aspire for is logically impossible to attain. The skeptics can only be satisfied if we are able to provide regarding other minds the kind of certainty we can provide regarding our own mental states and processes. Or paraphrasing the preceding statement, we would have to enter into the minds of others and then extract the certainty of knowledge that the skeptics are demanding. But this is a logical impossibility. It is logically impossible to feel another’s pain, just as it
is impossible to laugh another’s laugh, live another’s life or even die
another’s death. If some future technology enables me to feel
another’s pain, it will still be my feeling of his pain, and not his pain.

In fact, the knowledge of other minds is neither apriori nor analytical
and hence is falsifiable. It is an empirical knowledge originating from
this live-in world and therefore its solution must also be looked for
within a socio-linguistic framework.

Those who are skeptical about the knowledge of other minds hold
that, as minds are private entities, we cannot know them. It only holds
ture for them that are still lingering within the Cartesian fantasy of a
separate, private entity called ‘self’. But we have already seen that
mental states are nothing but brain states thus making them publicly
observable. So the observation of neuro-physical states of others
enables us to know of other ‘minds’. It might be said in objection that although water is nothing but H2O, still we do not say ‘bring me a glass of H2O’ when we are thirsty, neither do we say ‘I am eating a cluster of molecules’ when we are having an apple. Admitting the veracity of this objection, we must, however, keep in mind that the difference is nothing but conceptual in nature. Ontologically water is H2O and an apple is a cluster of molecules. Likewise, mental states are, and can be nothing but the neuro-physical states of the brain. So to know other minds is, ontologically speaking, essentially the same as knowing the neuro-physical state of others. But in our everyday life, that is not how we know them. We know others by their behavior and the use of a shared language prevalent in the community, which they belong to.
A language, if any, that is shared by me alone is a private language and hence no language at all. If I think I have a language that is shared and hence public in nature, then to make the language possible, there must be speakers of the same language who along with me belong to the same linguistic community. We want to express our thoughts to one another and also want our thoughts to be interpreted to make communication possible. And successful communication through expression and interpretation is possible if we follow the common rules of the language. I cannot have thoughts unless I am an interpreter of the speech of others. Therefore, if I have thoughts then others must also be present who make my thoughts possible. I have thoughts. Therefore, there do exist others who make my thoughts possible.
An interpreter knows the conditions under which utterances of sentences are true. Let us take for example, a linguistic community comprising of A and B. When A says, ‘I am in pain’, or maybe ‘C is in pain’ (C being a third individual), if A’s intention and desire is to convey the truth one type of interpretation will take place. But if A’s intention and desire is to convey a lie a different type of interpretation will be needed. Therefore, mere linguistic expressions are unable to help interpretation; a backdrop of desire, belief, intention etc. is needed. So to ascribe definite thoughts to someone requires simultaneous ascribing of desire, belief, intention etc. to that person.

When a person A utters a sentence like, ‘Paul is in pain’ with the intention of telling B that Paul is in ‘pain’, then the following riders are ascribed to his statement:
(i) A’s utterance is based on his belief about Paul’s being in ‘pain’;

(ii) His desire of telling B that Paul is in ‘pain’; and

(iii) A’s taking ‘Paul is in pain’ to mean that Paul is in pain.

Our understanding the meaning of sentences is a matter of our being able to put those sentences to use in ways that meet the approval of others native to the linguistic community. It is true that one successful interpretation does not guarantee the same on all occasions. It is also true that a misinterpretation does not make interpretation, per se, impossible. The interpreter thrives for a theory that optimizes agreement throughout the community to which the speaker and the interpreter belong. Our basic interest is to understand the actual utterances of others and this interest is not a theoretical but a practical one.
To summarize, the problem regarding other minds is a two-dimensional dilemma. Ontologically speaking, other minds is identical with other brains or to be more specific the neuro-physical state of a person. There is nothing vague or elusive about the mind, and any uneasiness can empirically be solved by proper dyadic translations.

Approaching the arena from the Epistemological gateway, the solution to this problem lies in shared language lacquered with the intentionality of the speaker as interpreted by the hearer. Other thoughts are those that make our own thoughts possible. Therefore, we cannot but accept the epistemic presence of an interpreter who makes our own thoughts possible. If I think then I have a language; and if I have a language then I belong to a community of people who
share the same language. As the rules of the language that I alone know can never be a touchstone to test the correctness of my use of the sentences and words that belong to that language, therefore, I need at least one interpreter of that language for this purpose, and hence an interpreter of that language who is different from the speaker must exist. Not only that, I must also have knowledge of that other mind to make usage and communication possible between us. Therefore, other minds are neither non-existent nor unknowable as claimed by the skeptics.