CHAPTER VI
MAN A AMBIGUOUS BEING

All scientific knowledge is basically creation of man. For an impression to pass as knowledge, it must appear within the field of our awareness. In natural sciences, for example, the reality of the physical and biological world is assumed; the world is believed to be there for its disclosure to the rational mind. Through the methods of observation, analysis, hypothesization, and verification these sciences aim at unfolding the 'mystery' of the universe. Thus if the objective existence of the phenomena observed is questioned, that is, if the presupposition that events outside us follow a certain order or uniformity and occur independent of the factors constituting the act of observation is doubted, scientific explanation would cease to have any 'real' reference. The very logic of natural sciences demands our unbiased registering of what goes on there 'outside'. The scientific attitude has to 'throw out' anything that it researches on an claims to know. To a scientist, reality is an organization of uniformities whose knowledge, in as much as it is contained inside descriptive or casual statements totally free from the subjective nuances, must be taken as the truth.

Because of the most dependable predictive ability and the resultant control natural sciences have come to command cover different kinds of spatio-temporal events, it is no wonder that their method is today valued as the most fruitful. There is no doubt that the immense credibility that natural sciences have acquired and the fantastic marvels that they have made possible in the spheres of their application are largely due to their method of approaching the universe, presenting and formulating the same. One cannot but admire the wealth of welfare and good that they have generated for
phenomenon in the universe or, if something does not fit into its compass, refuses to recognise its relevance. The phenomena whose very meaning science thus rejects, usually have a base in the psychic, the intentional, the transcendental, or the inward.

The empirical study of man conducted by behavioural sciences is in tune with their emulation of natural sciences phenomena which are anchored in what is called man's subjectivity these sciences would attempt to account for in terms of well-established natural laws. Their account of these phenomena, stated in the language of cause-effect relationship promises to provide us with an exhaustive chart indicating the actual and the possible human responses to different stimuli. Thus, the empirical-analytic approach to subjectivity, to the 'inside' of man, is in every respect identical with the approach of natural sciences to the structure of the universe.

If taken strictly on the ground of its effectiveness, the empirical-analytic explanations of man's behaviour patterns may seem to be flawless. This is because of the materialist and determinist character of such explanations. They make it a point not to construct untestable or transempirical hypothesis and not to confirm any statement unless it reflects observed or observable facts. Their fascination for observational language is boundless and uncritical. so, what has been regarded for centuries as the spiritual foundation of man is here understood through the categories of human behaviour. Our most authentic experiences like feelings, mental acts, self-knowledge, self-identity, meaning-intuition etc., which are the basic stuff constituting our subjectivity, are not recognised as primordial facts of our 'being', but rather as a variety of compounded behavioural expressions. In the process, man's subjectivity - that is, his 'inner space', or the act of transcendence that he fundamentally is, is lost.
Kant tried to prove that our experience of the world is governed by the constitution of our mind. The world in Knowledge conforms to the 'Stuff' human consciousness is made of, i.e., to the constitutive principles of our faculty of knowing. The organizing norms of our reason shape the way we know whatever we know. The problem (which in fact arose with Plato's theory of knowledge) regarding the connection between the idea and the object, the 'understood' and the perceived, the thing known and the thing -- in -- itself, was given by Kant a new status by placing the subjectivity of the knower at the centre of the whole process of knowledge.

Kant was sure that in the act of knowledge the mechanism of subjectivity must be regarded as most relevant. Not only does subjectivity organise the given impressions through its a priori categories (unity, totality, quantity, necessity, cause-effect, negation, existence, modality etc), but it must also be said that without it no experience would be possible. The revolution which copernicus had caused in astronomy with his hypothesis that the movement of the heavenly bodies is not just passively witnessed by (the man on) the earth but that the earth itself has its own independent movement, seems to have anticipated Kant's epistemological break through in philosophy. Copernicus had made the earth's motion a central factor in the explanation of the scheme of heavenly bodies; Kant made the constitution of the knowing mind the pivot around which knowledge takes place and is systematized.

In any knowledge situation it is subjectivity that confers a meaning on the known Object. In fact unless a thing enters into the range of human subjectivity it would not stand out as experienced. As husserl, for whom the direction of Kant's philosophy was of great significance, has pointed out, the unique characteristic of subjectivity is its intentionality, i.e its directedness.
toward the given.  

Husserl maintained that every experience harbours in itself a meaning of some kind, or at times several meanings, in accordance with which it emerges before consciousness as real. The peculiar nature of the object of knowledge is that it is something 'meant' to the knower, lies outside him, and is there because of him. Without this curious 'meaning' or 'beholding' function of the subject there would not be anything registered as known. Knowledge, in its essence, is an act of intuiting meaning whose organisation and association with objects outside is one of the most perplexing acts of our consciousness.

In this connection one is reminded of Rene Descartes. Although he makes only scant reference to language in his writings, certain observations about the nature of language play a significant role in the formulation of his general point of view. In the course of his careful and intensive study of the limits of mechanical explanation, which carried him beyond physics to physiology and psychology, Descartes was able to convince himself that all aspects of animal behaviour can be explained on the assumption that an animal is an automation. In the course of this investigation, he developed an important and influential system of speculative physiology. But he arrived at the conclusion that man has unique abilities that cannot be accounted for on purely mechanistic grounds, although, to a very large extent, a mechanistic explanation can be provided for human bodily function and behaviour. The essential difference between man and animal is exhibited most clearly by human language, in particular, by man's ability to form new statements which express new thoughts and which are appropriate to new situations. It is quite easy, in his view, to understand a machine's being constituted so that it can utter words, and even emit some responses, to action on it of a corporeal kind, which brings about a change in its organs, for instance, if it is touched in a
particular part it may ask what we wish to say to it, if in another part it may exclaim that it is being hurt, and so on. But it never happens that it arranges its speech in various ways, in order to reply appropriately to everything that may be said in its presence, as even the lowest type of man can do.4

This ability to use language must not be confused with "natural movements which betray passions and may be imitated by machines as well as manifested by animals". The crucial difference is that automata "could never use speech or other signs as we do when placing our thoughts on record for the benefit of others". This is a specific human ability, independent of intelligence. Thus,

it is a very remarkable fact that there are none so depraved and stupid, without even excepting idiots, that they cannot arrange different words together, forming of them a statement by which they make known their thoughts, while on the other hand, there is no other animal, however perfect and fortunately circumstanced it may be, which can do the same.

Nor can this distinction between man and animal be based on peripheral physiological differences. Thus Descartes goes on to point out that

it is not the want of organs that brings this to pass, for it is evident that magpies and parrots are able to utter words just like ourselves, and yet they cannot speak as we do, that is, so as to give evidence that they think of what they say. On the other hand, men who, being born deaf and dumb, are in the same degree, or even more than the brutes, destitute of the organs which serve the others for talking, are in the habit of themselves inventing certain signs by which they make themselves understood.

In short, then, man has a species-specific capacity, a unique type of intellectual organization which cannot be attributed to peripheral organs or related to general intelligence5 and which manifests itself in what we may
refer to as the "creative aspect" of ordinary language use - its property being both unbounded in scope and stimulus free.

The crucial role of language in Descartes's argument is brought out still more clearly in his subsequent correspondence. In his letter to the Marquis of Newcastle (1646), he asserts that "there is no one of our external actions which can assure those who examine them that our body is anything more than a machine which moves of itself, but which also has in it a mind which thinks - excepting words, or other signs made in regard to whatever subjects present themselves, without reference to any passion". The final condition is added to exclude "cries of joy or pain and the like" as well as "all that can be taught to any animal by art". He goes on, then to repeat the arguments in the Discourse on method, emphasizing one again that there is no man, so imperfect as not to use language for the expression of his thoughts and no "brute so perfect that it has made use of a sign to inform other animals of something which had no relation to their passions"; and once again, pointing to the very perfection of animal instinct as an indication of lack of thought and as a proof that animals are mere automata. In a letter of 1647 to Henry More, he expresses himself in the following terms:

But the principal argument, to my mind, which may convince us that the brutes are devoid of reason, is that, although among those of the same species, some are more perfect than others, as among men, which is particularly noticeable in horses and dogs, some of which have more capacity than others to retain what is taught them, and although all of them make us clearly understand their natural movements of anger, of fear, of hunger, and others of like kind, either by the voice or by other bodily motions, it has never yet been observed that any animal has arrived at such a degree of perfection as to make use of a true language; that is to say, as to be able to indicate to us
by the voice, or by other signs, anything which could be referred to thought alone, rather than to a movement of mere nature; for the word is the sole sign and the only certain mark of the presence of thought hidden and wrapped up in the body, now all men, the most stupid and the most foolish, those even who are deprived of the organs of speech, make use of signs, whereas the brutes, never do anything of the kind; which may be taken for the true distinction between man and brute. 8,9.

Free to reflect and to contemplate, man is able to observe, compare, distinguish essential properties, identify, and name. It is in this sense that language (and the discovery of language) is natural to man.

The empiricist hypothesis claims that the language acquisition device operates essentially by principles of inductive generalization which associates observable features of utterances with one another and with other relevant sensory information to obtain an internalization of the rules of a linguistic description.

It is this account of language acquisition that Noam Chomsky and his followers hotly deny.

Knowledge of language cannot arise by application of step-by-step inductive operations (Segmentation, classification, substitution procedures, 'analogy', association, conditioning and so on) of any sort that have been developed within linguistics, psychology, or philosophy.

Why does Chomsky insist upon this? Why does he claim that the mind must be innately equipped with much more than the power to perform inductive operations? It is possible to divide his reasons into two types:

(1) There is a set of empirical considerations which, supposedly, are incompatible with the Empiricist hypothesis sketched.
(2) The nature of the rules internalized is such that, even in principle, they cannot have been internalized through the procedures, postulated by Empiricists, alone.

The empirical considerations include at least the following:

(1) Compared with the number of sentences that a child can produce or interpret with ease, the number of seconds in a lifetime is ridiculously small. Hence the data available as input is only a minute sample of the linguistic material that has been thoroughly mastered, as indicated by actual performance.

We are faced, that is, with the remarkable fact that, in a very short time, and on the basis of relatively few heard utterances a child becomes a master of language. It is initially difficult to believe he could have attained this mastery solely on the basis if generalization from the small sample he has met with. It would be as of someone could become a chess-master as a result of having watched just one of two games of chess. So one is strongly tempted to suggest that the wide gap between input and output must be bridged by ascribing to the child a rich innate component.

(2) Not only is the input into the child tiny in relation to output, the input is also highly 'degenerate'. Most of the sentences a child hears are ungrammatical, due to slips of the tongue, etc., on the part of the speakers. If language rules were acquired solely by inductive generalizations, one would expect the child's competence to be infected with the mistakes he has heard, and would be expected to copy. Yet this does not happen. While the child will produce many ungrammatical sentences, the underlying competence to produced the right ones is there. This suggests that the child brings with him to the data a mechanism which, as it were, allows him to disregard the innumerable mistakes he hears, when it comes to internalizing the rules.
(3) There is evidence to suggest that mastery of language, unlike mastery in intellectual fields whose subject matter is entirely learned, is not radically affected by intelligence and environment. Children of low intelligence, brought up in disadvantageous linguistic environment (eg. a very lacitum family), are not deficient in grammatical skills to the extend one would extent upon Empiricist assumptions. The wealth and standard of linguistic input should make a very considerable difference to the speed and quality of the child's internalization of language on any Empiricist learning theory. But, apparently, they do not. This contrasts with ability at, say, history or philosophy, for other things being equal one's intelligence and intellectual environment are strongly determining factors. It is pertinent to point out here that while very stupid children can be very adept at language the cleverest ape can be taught the use of symbols only at the most primitive level. These considerations suggest a species - specific, innate capacity for absorbing language.

It seems, then, that a child's ability to correctly interpret new sentences as soon as he is presented with them cannot be due solely to his noting observable similarities between these and others he has learned to interpret in the past. Often it is his recognition of deep similarities that is involved. He must be employing knowledge of grammatical constituents that are quite remote from the phonetic features of the utterances he hears. There is no use in the Empiricists saying that he understands the new by analogy with the old, for it is not observable analogy. 'To refer to the processes involved as "analogy" is simply to give a name to what remains a mystery.'

Pursuing the fundamental distinction between body and mind, cartesian linguistics characteristically assumes that language has two aspects. In particular, one may study a linguistic sign from the point of view of the sounds
that constitute it and the characters that represent these signs or from the point of view of their "signification".

In short, language has an inner and an outer aspect. A sentence can be studied from the point of view of how it expresses a thought or from the point of view of its physical shape, that is, from the point of view of either semantic interpretation or phonetic interpretation.

Using some recent terminology, we can distinguish the "deep structure" of a sentence from its "surface structure". The former is the underlying abstract structure that determines its semantic interpretation, the latter, the superficial organization of units which determines the phonetic interpretation and which relates to the physical form of the actual utterance, to its perceived or intended form.

It is also argued by Chomsky and his followers that we must go beyond the surface structure of sentences in order to explain our intuitive understanding of many aspects of language. We must, in addition, postulate the existence of 'deep' or 'underlying' sentence structures. Why must we postulate the existence of deep structures? There are several reasons.

(1) First, as Chomsky says, 'the surface structure generally gives us very little indication in itself of the meaning of the sentence'. Consider, for example, the sentence 'The love of God is good'. Plainly this is ambiguous. It could be paraphrased either as (a) 'It is good for people to love God', or (b) 'God's love for people is good'. The surface structure of the sentence, that is, does not reveal its ambiguity. However, we can reveal the ambiguity at a deeper level, in the following way. We can think of there being two different underlying strings from which the sentence 'The love of God is good', can be derived.

(2) Another case where surface structure may be a poor guide to meaning is where two sentences mean the same, but differ in surface structure.
Next we have cases where the surface structure of two sentences is identical, but where there are intuitively felt differences in their syntax. Consider the sentences 'John is eager to please' and 'John is easy to please'. A moment's reflection shows that grammatically these are very different. The second can be paraphrased as 'It is easy to please John', while the first cannot be paraphrased as 'It is eager to please John'. This means that we must explain the difference between the two at deep level.

We have cases where sentences do not, on the surface, contain constituents which must, nevertheless, be read into them if we are to explain how the sentences are interpreted. Consider the imperative sentence 'Help the man'. For a number of reasons, though it is reasonable to say that underlying this sentence there is a string which contains 'you' as the subject of 'help'.

Chomsky says: the problem for the linguist is to determine the underlying system of rules that has been mastered by the speaker - hearer. Hence, in a technical sense, linguistic theory is mentalistic, since it is concerned with discovering a mental reality underlying actual behaviour.

Chomsky criticises behaviouristic psychology, saying that it excels in its experimental techniques, but it has not properly defined its object of inquiry, thus it has excellent tools, very good tools but nothing very much to study with them.

Chomsky and his followers reject behaviourism and he thinks that the only way to explain human behaviour is to ascribe complicated inner states interacting with each other, as well as with various stimuli, to produce our responses. In other words, he rejects behaviourism in favour of functionalism. Consider beliefs and desires for example. No particular desire is tied to a particular kind of input and output. Even if a person wants to get rich and
sees a bag of money before her, she may not seize it. Her behaviour is conditional on her other beliefs and desires: She may believe that the money is counterfeit or want to be honest as well as rich.

In order to understand human actions one must develop a hermeneutical approach to understand the meanings in art, religion, theology, literature and philosophy. But what do we mean by hermeneutics? Hermeneutics can loosely be defined as the theory or philosophy of the interpretation of meaning. It has recently emerged as a central topic in the philosophy of the social sciences, the philosophy of art and language and in literary criticism - even though its modern origin points back to the early nineteenth century.

The realization that human expressions contain a meaningful component, which has to be recognized as such by a subject and transposed into his own system of values and meanings, has given rise to the 'problem of hermeneutics': how this process is possible and how to render accounts of subjectively intended meaning objective in the face of the fact that they are mediated by the interpreter's own subjectivity.

Dilthey in his outline of 'The Rise of Hermeneutics' says that the awareness of one's own history and of that of mankind as a whole is an indispensable condition for a rich and fulfilled life. Through it, the limits of one's time are transcended and new sources of strength are opened up. Knowledge of past civilizations enriches our lives and their study itself affords us great pleasure, understanding the emotional states of other human beings not only accounts for a large amount of happy moments in our lives but also constitutes a precondition for action on our part. We recognize ourselves as individuals only through intercourse with others and so become aware of characteristics which are specific to ourselves.
Access to other human beings is possible, however, only by indirect means: What we experience initially are gestures, sounds, and actions and only in the process of understanding do we take the step from external signs to the underlying inner life, the psychological existence of the other. Since the inner life is not given in the experiencing of sign we have to reconstruct it; Our lives provide the materials for the completion of the picture of the inner life of others. The act of understanding provides the bridge for reaching the spiritual self of the other and the degree of enthusiasm with which we embark on this adventure depends on the importance the other has for us.

Understanding then, is motivated by our interest in partaking in the inner life of somebody else and is both necessary and rewarding. It establishes a communion of the human spirit dwelling in all of us and addressing us in multifarious forms from all directions.

Many a times individuals in modern societies are blind to these aspects of the inner life. They fail to realise the problems created by science and technology and the limits of scientific knowledge. Science and particularly its offshoot, technology, has made inroads into our social life eclipsing our genuine intellectual problems while giving the impression that there are none, because existence itself is quite pleasant and comfortable.

The noise of technology has smothered the "still, small voice of conscience" and created a false atmosphere of mental and moral security. Not only has technology polluted the environment but our minds have suffered the invasion of its mental anaesthesia which is a much more subtle and dangerous form of pollution.

The account of evolution of man given by science does not seem to satisfy us. The statements like about fifty four million years ago, that is in the deep night of the past, when the great primates (apes, monkeys etc) emerged
from the labyrinth of the evolutionary struggle, there was a distinct bifurcation of the tree of evolution. One of the branches, that of the great anthropoids ended up in the Gorilla; the other, the human branch, went through a series of approximations and culminated in modern man. This creature man that has surfaced after billions of years of evolutionary struggle is, if anything, his own antagonist. He is still being harassed as being the product of chance and purposelessness. To such these, Whitehead, the mathematician-philosopher, has the piquant comment: "Scientists who spend their life with the purpose of proving that it is purposeless constitute an interesting subject of study" (quoted by le comte) 12.

Karl, Jaspers in 'The Future of Mankind', summarises the present state of our mind (he is convinced that our future depends entirely on it) in these words:

"We want to find salvation in a technological conquest of technology - as if use of technology might itself be subject to technological directions. The turn in our destinies will come from the realization that technology, know-how, achievements, are not enough. The science and technology of man must become parts of an encompassing whole. Our thinking is not wholly serious until we come to the end of our know-how. Our age must learn that some things are beyond 'doing'. 13

I am reminded here of one of the statements made by a editor of the London Sunday Express (a newspaper with a very big circulation). he once wrote:

"Science gave us the Great war "

There are various other intellectuals who have realised the limitations of science for example Karl Popper once made a statement saying:
'It is important to realize that science does not make assertions about ultimate questions - about the riddles of existence, or about man's task in this world. This has often been well understood. But some great scientists and many lesser ones, have misunderstood the situation. The fact that science cannot make any pronouncement about ethical principles has been misinterpreted as indicating that there are no such principles while in fact the search for truth presupposes ethics.

Karl Popper
Dialectica 32 :342

Sir James Jeans in his book 'The Mysterious Universe' says:

"Many would hold that, from the broad philosophical standpoint, the outstanding achievement of twentieth century - physics is not the theory of relativity with its welding together of space and time, or the theory of quanta with its present apparent negation of the laws of causation, or the dissection of the atom with the resultant discovery that things are not as they seem; it is the general recognition that we are not yet in contact with reality. To speak in terms of Plato's well-known smile, we are still imprisoned in our cave, with our backs to the light, and can only watch the shadows on the wall."14

We now know that there are limits to the answers which science can provide. We now know that there are limits to the things we can know - what we can perceive is only a very thin slice of what is. And yet, to a large extent, we persist in assuming that the answers to our questions are there to be found, and that SCIENCE will do the job, tomorrow or the next day. There are uncertainties about the sub atomic world, mysteries concerning the far reaches of space, but perhaps this does not matter so very much - these are things which do not directly concern us. But the human mind does concern us - it is, in fact, our most immediate concern. Here, as nowhere else, it is important to
realise the limitations of science - and, more important still, the fallibility of our blind faith in scientific answers. Faith in science is, itself, quite unscientific.

Science began as one of several attempts to make sense of the universe. We are, in our manifold ways, still trying. Science has helped us transform ourselves and our world, but it has not done what it was initially intended to do. It has not provided us with THE ANSWER to "the riddle of the Universe". It has not even given us hope that such an answer exists. Here one is reminded of Sri Aurobindo a great philosopher who said science cannot tell us the truth of physical things. Even on the physical plane it cannot give us the correct answers. It cannot perfect our lives and our nature. It has its own infinite limitations. And I feel what he says is true because if one see's the history of science one notices that what was treated and considered as true in the past is not true today and what we consider as true today, may not be true for the future.

The answer's given by science to many of our problems are sometimes one sided. For example the behavioural interpretation of human existence, despite its occasional protestation, ignores the subjective, the creative, and the existential at its core. The inherent policy of modern science is that it either claims to guarantee the conclusive explainability (in theory, if not in practice) of almost every phenomenon in the universe or, if something does not fit into its compass, refuses to recognize its relevance. The phenomena whose very meaning science thus rejects, usually have a base in the psychic, the intentional, the transcendental, or the inward.

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However objective an understanding of the world science may claim to have reached, there is necessarily in it an expression of consciousness's unique act of intuiting and organizing meanings. It is this act that both Kant and Husserl recognized as constituting the essence of man. It is because of the presence of man in the world that all meanings, theories and explanations originate. The knowing consciousness sees the world to be there, builds up meanings and theories and explanations around it, and develops a technique of
controlling it. From the beginning of history, man has not only shown curiosity with regard to his environment but he has also, almost instinctively, applied whatever knowledge he could gain for changing it. In this sense, he has always been technological and subjectivist in his encounter with the world.

One of the shortcomings of the very methodology of natural and behavioural sciences is that their investigation is strictly confined to the causes of phenomena. Any thinking about the purposes and goals of human activity is supposed to fall outside their investigation. However, it is in the planning of science, in its practice for changing the situation on the globe to man's advantage, that scientists cannot forego the question on human subjectivity - human aspirations, hopes, desires and projects concerning the collective well-being of mankind. In fact, the whole history of scientific - technological civilization represents mankind's decision to pursue certain values, a definite way of life, to seek the fulfilment of its innate 'passions'. Thus, if man is to attain the fullest realisation of his spirit, it is necessary that he not only control his environment, and gain supremacy over the anti-survival forces, but also be aware of the inner dimensions of his self.

There is no technique by which the width of human subjectivity can be completely mapped out. It is a domain in which imagination, insights, intuitions, decisions, and one's Weltanschauung spring up before they take a concrete shape in one's life, conduct and attitude towards others. The sphere of subjectivity is too elusive to be captured inside language. It is of the nature of a wholesome feeling of one's being real and absolutely unrestrained in one's inner space. In fact, the very sense of being human that lies underneath our experience of living in the world is rooted deeply in our subjectivity. Subjectivity is the core of my existence in the sense that within my inner self I am aware of my personal identity, my unique reality, and my freedom to
manipulate my own thoughts, feelings, volitions, attitudes, and so on. The aim of what might be termed as the ontology of the inner man should be to verbalize this transempirical reality at the heart of our existence.\textsuperscript{15}

What science has consistently overlooked is the \textit{elan} of man. Human consciousness perpetually stretches itself out into transempirical dimensions. It creates feelings, interests, attitudes, insights, volitions, which are the very \textit{sine qua non} of our existence. Whatever progress the scientific - technological age has brought about must not, therefore, deprive man of his inner being, his search for the meaning of his life out there in the world. Perhaps, the most serious evil that science, when it is rooted totally in objectivity and determinism, has given rise to is the de-humanisation of man. Totally mechanical science has reduced man to a function, to an object, in its attempting to sever him from his primordial ontological base altogether. Man's self-alienation is one of the avoidable but grave maladies of our age.


2. D.P. Chattopadhyaya, Lester Embree, and Jitendranath Mohanty, Phenomenology, and Indian Philosophy, Published by Indian Council of philosophical Research 1992, p. 200.


9. Descartes goes on to explain that he does not deny to animals life or sensation or even feeling in so far as it depends only on the bodily organs.


11. Ibid p. 87


15. For a fuller treatment of this idea see Dr. R. A. Sinari 'The Quest for an Ontology of Human self' in S.S. Rama Rao Pappu and R. Puliandla, ed., Indian Philosophy: Past and Future, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1982, pp. 119-136.