



**MIND, MEANING AND EXTERNAL WORLD:  
A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE DEBATE BETWEEN NARROW AND  
BROAD CONTENT**

**Manoj Kumar Panda**

Research Scholar  
Centre for Philosophy  
School of Social Sciences  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi, 110067

**Introduction**

The study of the relationship between mind and world is one of the most contentious and yet compelling enterprises in philosophical discourse. Mind is a very much part of our life; rather we can say it is our life. We, human beings, possess both a mind and body and we live in a physical and social world. Following a traditional characterization, one may say that human beings live in two worlds, one is mental world and the other is the physical world. On the one hand, we have a mind, which thinks, perceives the external world through sense organs and is described as something internal, subjective, non-transparent and non-physical entity. On the other hand, we have a body, which exists in space and time, and is described as something material, physical, external, objective, and transparent entity. Given this opposite characterization, in this context, the problems that arise are: How our mind is directed to the external world? How our mind grasp and make sense of the world? The concept of meaning plays a crucial role in determining the relation between mind and world and in connecting subjective with the objective. Philosophical analysis of meaning of terms and our mental states holds the key to unravel the deep structure of intentionality. To understand the isomorphism between mind, meaning and the world, we have to understand the connection between mind and meaning, on the one hand and meaning and world, on the other hand. As an outcome, we can get hold of a better understanding of mind-world relationship. Before going to formulate the debate between narrow and broad content, let us first reflect on the nature of our perceptual content and mental content.

**I. The Nature of Perceptual Content and Mental Content.**

Perceptual experience represents the world to the subject in a particular way and the way it represents various features of the world constitutes its content, called 'perceptual content'. It consists of various objects and properties of the world. The content of the perceptual experience not only determines how the world would actually be presented to the subject in experience, but also how the object of the world would



seem to the subject in his or her experience. Perceptual experience is one of the basic ways of the subject's encountering and entering into the world, and perceptual representation is arguably the most basic way in which the mind represents the world. The content of the perceptual experience may be called objective in the sense that it represents to the subject how things are in the external world or in the objective world. In this sense, it can be held that the content of perceptual experience is strongly determined by the character of the perceiver's environment. Most of the mental states are said to be object directed states or intentional states. The directedness or aboutness feature of the mental states contributes to its content from the external world. Subject's environment constitutes the content of his perceptual experience and can be so only if the certain feature of the world which is presented to the subject's sense organ is actually represented to the subject's mind. It is commonly held that perception is a causal concept which seems to require the presence of what is perceived in the physical world. There certainly seems to be a causal link between the perceiver's sense organs and the objects or states of affairs in the world such that the object in the world causes the perceptual representation.

There is also another sense in which we can assert that the content of perceptual experience is subjective. There are different subjects in the world, who experience the particular aspects of the world differently. Certain aspects of the world which seem to me in a particular way need not necessarily seem to others in the same way and different perceptions include different subjective properties associated with each perception. The way a certain object appears to the experiencing agent constitutes it Phenomenology<sup>1</sup> i.e. the idea that there is something like to see that particular object. The internal facts of the subject include intrinsic states of the body and brain, behavioral dispositions non-environmentally specified and proximate sensory stimulations which is identified with reference to their sources, as well as the internal psychological states of the subject. The way the world seems to the subject constitutes the content of the perceptual experience in an important sense. The fundamental problems that arise, is the content of experience necessarily determined by the function of actual environmental factors? Is the causal link between the world and the experience determines the content of experience? Or is the content of experience determined by the internal psychological states of the subject? These are some of the questions which have been answered by different philosophers in radically different ways in contemporary philosophical horizon leading to the formulation of different theories about the mind and meaning.

Content of our perceptual experience about the world leads us to entertain certain beliefs about the world. Though perceptual content in a way constitutes the content of our beliefs, desires etc., there are some important differences between perceptual experiences and belief states<sup>2</sup>. Perceptual experiences are said to be phenomenal states, whereas beliefs states are not phenomenal states, they are termed as 'propositional attitudes'<sup>3</sup>. The very same question can be asked in the context of mental states like belief, desire, emotion, intention, etc. The question is that, is the



content of our belief states are constituted by the external environmental factors? Or is it determined by the nature of the internal psychological states of the subject who possesses the particular belief? The central concern of the debate is: how do mental states represent states of affairs in the world? What constitutes the content of the mental state? On the one hand, it seems that the causal determinant characteristics of the mental states depend explicitly on the internal characteristics of the subject who possesses the state. On the other hand, certain arguments and some imaginative thought experiments persuade many philosophers to agree on the view that the content of the mental state and, in particular, the content of perceptual state solely depends on the external environment, including both physical and social. These are some of the problems which lie at the heart of the contemporary philosophy of mind and are very fundamental issues pertaining to the relationship between mind and world. These problems have been addressed by different philosophers in order to understand the nature of mental content which leads to the important distinction between two kinds of mental content, one is *narrow content* and other is *broad content*.

## 2. Formulating the Debate

Narrow mental content can be defined as the content which does not depend on the subject's environment. A narrow content of a mental state, say, a belief, is the kind of content that could not be different unless the subjects who possess the state were different in some intrinsic psychological respect, that is, if the intrinsic properties of the subject differ, then the content of his mental state also differs. In this interpretation of mental content, environmental factors do not penetrate into determining the content of the subject's mental states. So, even when the environment of the individual may change, this change does not necessarily affect subject's mental content. The thesis holds that the intrinsic properties of the individual include some properties which are not determined by the subject's physical properties. This is precisely what dualism proposes about the relation of mind to the external world. Rene Descartes, in his book *Meditations on First Philosophy*, argues that our perceptual states and belief states could be exactly as they are even if the world is nothing like what we think it is. Whatever radical difference may occur in our environment in due course, this does not suffice to make a difference to the content of our perception and belief.

The idea of narrow content can be contrasted with the idea of 'broad' or 'wide'<sup>4</sup> content. Broad content can be defined as the content of the subject's mental state or perceptual state which is determined by the subject's environment as well as the features pertaining to the individual subjects. It holds that our mental content do change as the features of the world change, because they are causally related to each other<sup>5</sup>. The doctrine of broad content holds that the content of the belief states or perceptual states is constituted in virtue of the relations<sup>6</sup> between the subject's belief, perception and matters outside the subject. It holds that the content of all beliefs are partly outside the head. To understand further the distinction between broad and narrow content, we need to formulate the debate properly so that we can clearly draw the



demarcating line between the two sides in order to know what exactly they claim.

In order to do that, let us start with making the distinction between externalism and internalism in philosophy of mind<sup>7</sup>. The term externalism and internalism are often used in philosophy of mind most commonly in connection with the meaning and content of mental states. The word 'content' and the word 'meaning' are synonymous.<sup>8</sup> The basic or fundamental question on which these two different philosophical theories are debating is whether the content or meaning of the mental state is in the head or outside the head? What constitutes its meaning? Is it the person's environment or his internal individualistic considerations? It is obvious that a person having a certain belief is in part a matter of how that person is; otherwise it would not be that person who has the belief. But the question arises: is it entirely a matter of how that person is? Or, does her environment or causal history play a role in some crucial? Suppose, I am experiencing a blue eyed hare running towards the forest end in a slightly dark setting. It is clearly the case that the truth and falsity of the above statement is determined on the basis of the existence of a real hare near me in the world. But the question arises, is it the case that the truth and falsity of the existence of the real hare determines what is believed about? There is an important difference between determining the truth and falsity of a factual statement and of a belief state. When I believe that there is a hare near me, then it becomes controversial that whether my belief is determined by what the belief is about, i.e., the real hare or is being determined by my internal constituent.

Externalism and internalism answer these questions in radically different ways which lead to different views about the relationship between mind and world. According to externalism, our mental state is relational in character and thus it holds that the meaning of our mental content is determined in part by relations to the external physical world and thus is not entirely determined by what lies within the subject. It suggests that there is a deep connection between our mental states and conditions in the physical world. By contrast, internalism argues that mental content is non-relational in character. The content of our thought absolutely has no connection with the external world, and thus essentially independent of the external world. Externalism often accuses that internalism makes the relationship between mind and world problematic by separating one from the other. But internalism does not literally locate the mind inside the head; their main contention is that mental content cannot be reduced to factors in the physical environment.<sup>9</sup> Descartes argues that we might have exactly the same mental state as we now have even if there is no external world at all with reference to my belief, desire etc. So, the fundamental question of the debate between internalism and externalism is: whether mind is fundamentally autonomous with respect to the world? Or does the world enter into the very nature of mind?<sup>10</sup>

### **3. Argument for Broad Content or Externalism.**

There are many arguments for the support of Broad Content out of which Putnam's argument is one of the most important and pioneer argument for the Broad Content. He argued for the Broad Content in the context of philosophy of language



i.e. in the context of the meaning of Linguistic Utterances and in particular, meaning of word. Our aim is to extend the argument further to Philosophy of mind i.e. in the context of the meaning of Perceptual states and mental states.

The defining properties of a sentence or a 'propositional attitude' for both externalism and the causal theories of reference are the same, i.e., the objective facts of the external world. Putnam's externalist account of mind is also known as 'semantic externalism' which is described by Davidson as bringing the 'anti-subjectivistic revolution' in philosophy and philosopher's way of seeing the world. According to Davidson, right from the time of Descartes, philosophers have been engaged in elucidating knowledge on the basis of subjective view of experience. It's due to Putnam, Burge, and others, philosophy could now take the objective realm for consideration and start questioning the alleged 'truth' of subjective experience.

Putnam vehemently criticized the traditional theory of meaning for being individualistic, subjectivistic, and narrow, that is other than social and collective, and for neglecting the contribution of external reality to meaning and our mental reality in general. Traditional theory of meaning in his opinion is grounded in two seemingly infallible assumptions:

- For the subject to know the meaning of a mental state is just a matter of being in a certain psychological state in narrow sense. It is the psychological state in the same sense in which state of memory and psychological dispositions are psychological states.
- The meaning of a mental state determines its reference.<sup>11</sup> (emphasis added)

It is argued on the traditional conception of meaning that, the intension of the term determines both its reference and meaning. It is assumed that, speakers who are in the same psychological state (in narrow sense), when they utter a word share both its *intension* and its *extension*<sup>12</sup>. The meaning of mental state is determined by the psychological concepts the subject possesses during that moment as a narrow psychological state.

The concept of psychological state as expressed in traditional philosophy is based on the assumption of 'methodological solipsism'<sup>13</sup>. It does not; in this sense of psychological state presuppose the existence of any individual or anything other than the subject to whom that state is ascribed. On this conception, it is logically possible to possess the state without even subject's body. Putnam argues that this sense of psychological state is not only dominant in philosophy of Descartes; it is also implicitly present in the whole of traditional philosophical psychology. The scope and nature of psychology has been limited to fit into some mentalistic preconception by this conception of narrow psychological state. To oppose this philosophical conservatism, Putnam draws a distinction between psychological state in broad sense and psychological state in narrow sense. In his opinion, wide/broad psychological states are those states which refer to other factors in the environment as well as the subject himself. Putnam



in a characteristic way writes,

“Only if we assume that psychological states in the narrow sense have a significant degree of causal closure (so that restricting ourselves to psychological states in the narrow sense will facilitate the statement of psychological laws) is there any point to engaging in this reconstruction, or in making the assumption of methodological solipsism. But the three centuries of failure of mentalistic psychology is tremendous evidence against this procedure, in my opinion.”<sup>14</sup>

Putnam argued against the role of narrow content of the mental state or narrow psychological state in determining the meaning of mental state in a very fascinating way. He does not say that psychological sense in the narrow sense simply does not exist. According to him, narrow psychological states which are bodily and mental dispositions of the individual surely exist. But, the point made by him is that, they do not just enter into determining the meaning of the word, when a speaker utters or thinks about that word. He rather suggests that what determines the meaning of a term or mental state is a psychological state in broad or wide sense which includes person's social and physical environment. In order to prove this further, Putnam follows a fascinating way. We can modify the two assumptions of the traditional notion of meaning mentioned above for our convenience (without changing their basic intention) as:

- Narrow psychological states of the subject about a particular mental state determine the meaning of that mental state.
- The term's *extension* is determined by the meaning of mental state which is earlier fixed by the subject's narrow psychological state.<sup>15</sup>

These above two assumptions jointly claim that meaning of the subject's mental state is a narrow psychological state of the subject which determines its *extension*. For example, if there are two speakers who possess the same psychological state with regard to a particular term or an object, then, the assumption of the traditional theory of meaning is that the meaning and the *extension* of the term must be same for these two individuals. If the two individuals are in same psychological state (in narrow sense) about a particular object, then they cannot understand the term differently. They claim that the narrow psychological state of the subject determines the *intension* as well as the *extension* of the term.

Putnam, on the other hand, argues that these claims cannot be jointly true of any theory of meaning for the reason that they involve a contradiction. He suggests that two individuals can be in same narrow psychological state with regard to a particular object, yet they understand or mean the object differently, and hence, the meaning of the term differs. For Putnam, two terms A and B cannot have the same meaning if the *extension* of these terms differs, and hence, narrow psychological state cannot determine the *extension* and meaning of the term. It is possible that two speakers are in the same (narrow) psychological state, but the *extension* and hence,



meaning of the term differs from each other. So the meaning of a term is not determined by the narrow psychological state of the subject. In order to argue for this, Putnam developed a thought experiment which is famously known as 'twin earth science fiction' story.

### **Twin Earth Thought Experiment**

In this science fiction story, we are told to imagine that there exists a planet which is just like our earth, which may be called twin earth. It is further supposed that twin earth is molecule for molecule identical with earth. We can in particular suppose that, every human being has an identical copy existing in twin earth. All the languages that are spoken in earth are also spoken in twin earth. Let us now turn our attention to a particular case, where suppose that there exists a man called Oscar in earth and so is there Oscar<sub>2</sub> or twin Oscar in twin earth. Oscar<sub>2</sub> is the doppelganger of Oscar in earth. They share the same psychological state about the natural world or states of affairs and facts (natural kinds) in earth and twin earth.

But interestingly, there is a little peculiar difference existing between earth and twin earth concerning the term 'water'. The water in earth is composed of H<sub>2</sub>O whereas twater in twin earth consists of a different chemical formula let's say ABC. The chemical formula of H<sub>2</sub>O and ABC are radically different. The twater in twin earth looks like water, but it is not really water. It implies that the term 'water' in earth and twin earth has different *extension*. The term 'water' in earth refers to H<sub>2</sub>O and the term 'twater' in twin earth refers to ABC. In this sense, the term 'water' simply has two different meanings in earth and twin earth. What we call water in twin earth is simply not water. The word has a different meaning in earth in the sense in which it is used in earth. What the twin earthians call 'water' simply is not water. The *extension* of water in earth is consisting of H<sub>2</sub>O molecules and the *extension* of 'twater' in twin earth is the set of wholes consisting of ABC molecules.<sup>16</sup>

Now, let us consider what Oscar and twin Oscar have in their head about water. Oscar and twin Oscar are identical copies. They share the same psychological states about the word 'water'. But since water and twater in earth and twin earth respectively are different, Oscar's and twin Oscar's belief about them are different from each other. When Oscar believes that water quenches our thirst, he refers to H<sub>2</sub>O and twin Oscar believes the same then he refers to ABC. Here Oscar and twin Oscar have the same narrow psychological states about the water whereas the extensions of their beliefs about the water are different. However, as mentioned above the narrow psychological states of the Oscar and twin Oscar do not determine the extension of the term 'water' and hence meaning of their beliefs about the term 'water'. Hence, it is argued that the extension and meaning of the term 'water' is surely not a function of narrow psychological state of the person who uses that term. The psychological state of the Oscar and Oscar<sub>2</sub> differ in broad sense of the term 'psychological' which includes individual's social and causal and cultural history. According to solipsists, if Oscar and twin Oscar share the same narrow content, then



they are cognitively identical, that means, Oscar and twin Oscar must understand and grasps what they believe about water or what they perceive about water in the same way. But here they understand and grasp various propositional attitudes about 'water' differently in spite of the fact that they are inherently same in terms of their intrinsic properties. So, their cognitive identity differs from each other not on the basis of their intrinsic properties but on the basis of their reference to the worldly properties.

Putnam concludes his argument based on the thought experiment by saying that "cut the pie any way you like, 'meaning' just ain't in the head."<sup>17</sup> Meaning, therefore, is determined by the broad psychological state of the individual. What a subject understands by the term 'water' is dependent on how water exists and used in external world. The way water exists in the external world should be the defining factor of the meaning of water.

There are certain sorts of words whose environment determines their *extension* and hence meaning. The meaning of a particular word has an appropriate connection to the sociological and physical environment where the word is used by the community. According to Putnam, *extension* of a word should be the guiding function of its meaning. Unless it is so we will loose some links between the subject and the world, between what speakers say and how things have to be for what they say to be true. What a subject means when she experience water and what a thinker means when she desires to have water are not dependent on what she has in her brain as a narrow psychological states absolutely indifferent to water's natural and environmental history.

#### **4. The road ahead.**

There are many interpretations of the above thesis of Putnam. We need to understand Putnam's slogan that 'meaning ain't in the head' in a quite specific way since there is always a chance of misinterpretation of it. The exercise of meaning is certainly seems to be our mental capacity where our rational capacity or one can say mental act comes to the forefront. Mental act on this conception is an act of intellect, an act of rational and conceptual embodied being, and, for this reason, an intentional act of human mind. So, when Putnam says that meaning is not in the head, the basic intention is to suggest that, mind is not in the head. Here our main center of attention must be about how we should be aware of what we really mean when we say 'in the head'. The idea is to deny certain conception of both immaterial inner and material inner. He rejects the idea of mind as spatially located where its owner is. On one side, it is to suggest that the mind is not located somewhere in the literally, spatial and interior of its owner. The mind must not be equated with a materially constituted and space occupying organ, such as the brain. McDowell, in extending Putnam's basic intention, writes,

"... the point of the thesis is not just to reject a more specific spatial location for someone's mind than that it is where its possessor is. It is to reject the whole idea that





the mind can appropriately be conceived as an organ: if not a materially constituted organ, then an immaterially constituted organ... We should discard, that mental life must be conceived as taking place in an organ, so that its states and occurrences are intrinsically independent of relations to what is outside the organism.”<sup>18</sup>

McDowell suggests that though the functioning of brain as an organ is necessary for mental life, but it is wrong to think that the functioning of brain itself can be identified with the whole of what we call mental life. And on the other hand, to deny that mental life is not wholly the functioning of brain states is not to presuppose that mind is a mysterious immaterial organ. We should take Putnam’s thesis to be arguing against both Physical and non-Physical Internalism.

McDowell in this context very famously says,

“Mental life is an aspect of our lives, and the idea that it takes place in the mind can, and should, be detached from the idea that there is a part of us, whether material or (supposing this made sense) immaterial, in which it takes place. Where mental life takes place need not be pinpointed any more precisely than by saying that it takes place where our lives take place. And then its states and occurrences can be no less intrinsically related to our environment than our lives are.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Pure physical externalism and phenomenology.**

In the last section, we discussed the one side of the problem that Putnam’s thesis must be arguing against and one plausible understanding of mind in favour of which Putnam’s thesis must be heading for. Here I think there is also a need to identify the other side of the problem that Putnam’s thesis should also be arguing against.<sup>20</sup> There are different versions of externalism or intentionalism that have been put forth by various philosophers. Here the problem is: what kind of externalism or representationalism about mental content one should adopt in order to get a plausible picture of the relation between mind and world? One need to be aware of the fact that when Putnam says our mind is constrained by physical environment, he should not seem to be saying that our mental states and perceptual states can be entirely explained by in terms of physical terms.<sup>21</sup> We need to immunize ourselves against the one extreme possibility which many theories of modern philosophy easily fall or very admirably adopt (some of them consciously and some of them unconsciously). We need to rescue the picture of mind and world relation from pure physicalism or scientism.

Let us explain that extreme possibility a bit.

Strong reductive representationalism<sup>22</sup> which one of the current fashion of philosophy of mind has been defined by Tye in the following way,

“... the view that both the representational content with which phenomenal character is identical can be spelled out in physical or functional terms and that the further conditions on that content can be spelled out similarly.”<sup>23</sup>



The reductive version of intentionalism holds the view that the condition by which the representational content represents the objects and states of affairs in the world are functional and identifies phenomenological character of experience with the qualities or features of the object which is experienced. It does not identify it with the feature of perceiving states themselves. On this view, there is no subjective feature of our experience which lie beyond physicalists and reductionists explanation. According to philosophers who argue for a Physical externalist, knowing what it is like to see red is just a matter of knowing what visual quality or property of redness is like. Fred Dretske another physical externalist while arguing for a reductive externalist view states that,

“There is no more to the quality of one’s experiences in experiencing blue than there is to the color blue since the color blue is the color of one’s experiences.”<sup>24</sup>

On this Conception, phenomenal character of experiencing blue is nothing subjectively qualitative than just the property of blueness in the world. Phenomenal qualities of experience are just the external qualities of the physical world which are represented in consciousness. But we need to see how reductive intentionalists can be able to explain the phenomenal character in terms of objective and physical properties of the world independently of the subjective experience.

Dretske is of the opinion that mental representations can be explained in terms of informational functions. Phenomenal character of experience or ‘qualia’ is identified with those properties systematically represented in experience and the properties systematically represented in experience are just those ‘the senses have the natural function of providing information about’. Reductive ‘Representationalism’ has a tendency to explain mental phenomena and conscious states in terms of physical and functional terms. They have firm inclination towards the physicalist and functionalist theories of mind.

On the other hand, the anti-intentionalist who argue for the phenomenal or subjective qualities of experience often criticize the intentionalism thesis which is being influenced by the physicalist and functionalist account of mind.<sup>25</sup> While they argue for phenomenal character of perceptual experience, they are actually arguing against the physicalists or reductionistic account of mind. They are of the opinion that the most important feature of consciousness, i.e., the phenomenology of consciousness has not been given much importance by physicalist, functionalist and reductionist theories of mind.

The physicalist or reductionist accounts of mind have given less importance to the most important feature of consciousness, i.e., the phenomenal or subjective character of consciousness. Physicalism about mind has always discussed ‘consciousness as consciousness of something’. It has always emphasized on the physical or objective properties of conscious experience and thereby excluded the phenomenological and subjective domain of conscious experience from its explanation.



On the contrary, while we are discussing the problem of the relationship between mind and world, the phenomenological feature of consciousness should be properly taken into account to understand this relationship appropriately. We need to build up an objective intentionality view of our mind which will do adequate justice in explaining the subjective domain of our experience.

This phenomenal quality of color experience or 'qualia' of colour experience cannot be given a pure physical or functional or, we can say, intentionalist account. Physical knowledge or physical information about the color experience does not include the subjective properties of color experience. It only consists of the objective properties of color. Physicalists about color experience would claim that all the knowledge that we have about any particular color is physical knowledge and this knowledge exhausts our knowledge about the color. As we can see that this conclusion of physicalism is not correct and hence there is something beyond the physical knowledge that is the phenomenal qualities of color experience. So, there is something beyond the objective properties of color and that is the subjective properties of experience and this factor has not been taken into account in physicalism or functionalism.

### **Conclusion**

One of the philosophical anxieties in modern philosophy, in fact, in the whole philosophy, is the relationship between mind and world. The ontological gap between mind and world, thought and experience, thought and object, consciousness and matter, which is an outcome of dualism, has been the concern of modern philosophy. With the development of cognitive science, brain science, neurophysiology and new scientific discoveries about the function of mind and its connection to visual experience, the old problem of dualism, the problem of mind and world relationship, have been addressed in modern philosophy from different perspectives by using various techniques and constructing various models of their relationship. The fundamental problem with dualism is that it threatens us to disconnect the world from our mind and thereby damaging the link between thought and reality. We should construct the relationship between mind and world in such a way that there would be no gulf open up between thought and its objects for dualism to exploit. In modern philosophy, many theories, while trying themselves to get rid of the problem of dualism, fall again into the trap of dualism. Their different faulty ways of looking into the relationship between mind and world provokes dualism to return again to its business. (Physical internalists, Non-physical internalists, pure externalists and reductionists fall into this category.)

Descartes made the mistake by suggesting that mind is an immaterial organ which is distinct from the physical world or extended world. Physicalism committed the same mistake by suggesting that mind is a material organ. Yet, again, internalist version of physicalism made the mistake by assuming that though mind is a physical organ identical with the brain; its function is entirely independent of external environment. It has been a tendency of many theories in modern philosophy to take mind as material and to give a physicalistic or at least naturalistic account of it. Though it is true that



they have tried their level best to give a naturalistic account of mind, their focus on naturalism is misplaced by their adoption of an extreme form of physicalism or scientism. We have to recognize the fact that a purely scientific understanding of the mind cannot be the right kind of understanding of rational subjects and their thoughts. Physical knowledge of the brain cannot be a complete knowledge of our mind and its phenomenological domain. Moreover, we should jettison the idea that our broader conception of the world (in which minds are also included) is necessarily physical.

To liberate oneself from these debates between externalism and internalism, materialism and immaterialism, physicalism and non-physicalism, narrow and broad content, etc., we should reject the idea that mind can be conceived as an organ, either material or immaterial. It is certainly wrong to hold that our mental, psychological and rational life is taking place in an organ and absolutely dependent on the functioning of that organ. Though, it is true that the operation of brain as a part of the body is necessary for a thinking being, but that cannot constitute the whole of our mental life. We should encourage the idea that our mind together with the world constitutes the mental life. Our mental life takes place where our life takes place. It does not necessarily need to reside in a spatial location which is exploited by dualism. Various writings by Putnam, McDowell, McCulloch and others on this topic have been responsible to expose the latent Cartesianism in contemporary philosophy of mind.

Physical externalist or pure intentionalist way of looking into the relationship between mind and world cannot be sustainable because of its phenomenological implausibility. They cannot include the phenomenological features of our experience in their explanation. There are also problems involved in physical internalism because they advocate the material version of Descartes' dualism which is problematic. An objective, intentional and external account of mind–world relationship does not have to be necessarily purely physical or reductionistic. Natural science's way of describing our mind and its relation to world is forgetful of the role of social institution and cultural embedded-ness in shaping our mind. We should reject the idea that the object directedness of our mental states (intentionality) and what it is like to in a particular mental state (phenomenology) are detached from each other and needs to be studied independently.

#### **Bibliography**

- > Bilgrami, Akeel (1992). *Belief and Meaning: The Unity and Locality of Mental Content*. Oxford, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell.
- > Burge, Tyler (1979). "Individualism and the mental," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 4, pp. -121.
- > Burge, Tyler (1986a). "Individualism and Psychology," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 95, No. 1, pp. 3–45.
- > Burge, Tyler (1986b). "Intellectual Norms and Foundations of Mind," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 83, No. 12, pp. 697–720.
- > Burge, Tyler (1986c). "Cartesian Error and the Objectivity of Perception," in



- Subject, Thought, and context*, P. Petit and J. McDowell (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- > Descartes, Rene (1984–91). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (3 vols.). J. Cuttingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch and (Vol III only) A. Kenny. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  - > Dretske, Fred (1993). "Conscious Experience," *Mind, New Series*, Vol. 102, No. 406, pp. 263–283.
  - > Fodor, Jerry (1975). *The Language of Thought*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company.
  - > Fodor, Jerry (1980). "Methodological Solipsism Considered as a Research Strategy in Cognitive Psychology," in *Mind Design: Philosophy, Psychology, Artificial Intelligence*, John Haugeland (ed.), Cambridge: The MIT Press.
  - > Fodor, Jerry (1983). *The Modularity of Mind, An Essay on Faculty Psychology*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: A Bradford Book, The MIT Press.
  - > Fodor, Jerry (1987). *Psychosemantics: The Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: A Bradford Book. The MIT Press.
  - > Fodor, Jerry (1991). "A Modal Argument for Narrow Content," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 88, No. 1, pp. 5–26.
  - > Fodor, Jerry (1994). *The Elm and the Expert*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
  - > Jackson, Frank (1986). "What Mary Didn't Know," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 83, No. 5, pp. 291–295.
  - > McCulloch, Gregory (2003). *The Life of the Mind: An Essay on Phenomenological Externalism*. London & New York: Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group.
  - > McDowell, John (1992). "Putnam on Mind and Meaning," *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 20, pp. 35–48.
  - > McDowell, John (1994). *Mind and World*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
  - > McGinn, Colin (1989). *Mental Content*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
  - > Nagel, Thomas (1974). "What Is It Like To Be a Bat?," *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 83, pp. 435–450.
  - > Putnam, Hillary (1975). "The Meaning of 'Meaning'," In *Language, Mind and Knowledge*, K. Gunderson (ed.), pp. 131–193, Minneapolis, MW: University of Minnesota Press.
  - > Putnam, Hillary (1981). *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

---

<sup>1</sup> Here I am not equating the idea of narrow content with idea of phenomenology. The idea of narrow content and the idea of phenomenal content are different.

<sup>2</sup> McGinn, (1989), p. 62.



- <sup>3</sup> It was Bertrand Russell who started calling mental states of this variety as 'propositional attitudes'. He introduced the term 'propositional attitudes' in his book *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*. Propositional attitudes can be described by the indicative statements or sentences with a 'that' clause. For example, take the sentence 'John believes that crow is black'. Here, the subject John is said to have an attitude of believing a proposition or a situation that is referred to by the 'that' clause, 'crow is black'. In contemporary philosophy, the term 'content' is used where Russell used the word 'proposition'. The content of the propositional attitudes is the proposition towards which the attitudes are directed, i.e., what is believed, what is desired, what is felt, what is feared etc. It is commonly said that all propositional attitude states are 'intentional states.'
- <sup>4</sup> The supporters of the broad content need not completely deny the narrow psychological states of the subject. Rather some of them say that this is part of the broad content. But this is not the whole of our mental content.
- <sup>5</sup> Here in the case of causal relation is asymmetrical and one sided. Mind is causally dependent on the world but not the other way round.
- <sup>6</sup> There are various kinds of relations may be possible between mental states and the external world like logical relation, semantic relation and evidential relation etc. see Tim Crane (1992).
- <sup>7</sup> One can say that the debate between narrow and broad content is a recent development of a more traditional and the age old debate between internalism and externalism. Traditionally, the debate was focused on the meaning of linguistic expressions. Our aim in this paper is to centre the discussion on the meaning of mental states and perceptual states.
- <sup>8</sup> From now on, we will use the term content and meaning interchangeably.
- <sup>9</sup> In recent times, there are some physicalists who claim to be internalists. An extreme version of the internalism is Descartes' picture of the mind.
- <sup>10</sup> The adherents of narrow mental content are variously called as narrow minded, internalists, individualists, local, methodological solipsists, etc. The philosophers, who argue for the existence of the narrow content, are René Descartes, Kent Bach (1987), Tim Crane(1991), Jerry Fodor(1987, 1991a, 1991b,1995), Gabriel Segal(1989, 2000), Ned Block (1986, 1991, 1999), Brian Loar(1988, 2003) etc. One of the earliest arguments for the narrow content we find in Descartes' book *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In an important way, we can say that he is the one who has started the debate between internalism and externalism, though not in the same term as contemporary philosophers do. On the opposite side, the proponents of the broad content are variously known as broad minded, contextual or wide, anti- individualists and externalists etc. They argue that the content of the mental state is logically and necessarily dependent on what caused the belief and on believer's surroundings. The philosophers, who are arguing for it, are, Hillary Putnam (1975), John McDowell (1997), Tyler Burge (1979, 1986, 1988, 1989, 2007, 2010), Saul Kripke (1979), Robert Stalnaker (1989, 1999, 2006), Robert A. Wilson (1995) etc.

Different influential arguments have been put forth by philosophers in support of either broad or narrow content. Various scientific thought experiments have been conducted by these philosophers. Hillary Putnam's twin earth



thought experiment is one of the classic thought experiments in support of the existence of the broad content. Putnam in his celebrated article "The Meaning of Meaning (1975)," has argued in support of externalism. He is the pioneer in the history of contemporary analytic philosophy of mind, who has argued against the narrow psychological state having representational capacity. Though Putnam is said to be the advocate of the physical externalism, but a form of social externalism can be easily found in his arguments for externalism. Another strong argument for externalism, we can find in John McDowell's article "On the Sense and Reference of a Proper Name (1977)." John McDowell has argued in favor of Putnam, but he is one of the philosophers who have extended Putnam's argument to the case of mental content. Taylor Burge, in his article "Individualism and the Mental (1997)," has argued for the externalism as well. He has made a thought experiment in the context of social environment of the people and hence his idea of externalism is called social externalism. There are some important differences between Putnam's and Burge's externalism. Gregory McCulloch has argued for phenomenological externalism in his book *The Life of the Mind*.

" Brain in a vat" argument is one of the most important arguments for internalism. It is a science fiction story where it is supposed that we take a foetal brain, place it in a vat full of liquids, subject it to exactly the same inputs – neural stimuli, nutrients, and so on, as a normal brain housed in a body would be subjected to, and allow it to grow exactly as it would were if normally placed in a body. Then, it is argued that the brain or internal states of the person is not connected to the external world by the causal and social mechanisms of the subject. A similar version of the science fiction story, we can find in *Matrix* and Verhoeven's film *Total Recall*, where it is shown that the people and the world around us are complete delusion produced by a suitably programmed virtual reality machines.

<sup>11</sup> Putnam, (1975), p. 225. Putnam used 'term' in stead of 'mental state'.

<sup>12</sup> There are different ways in which these two terms are understood in traditional philosophical literature. The most widely accepted characterization of *intension* is that, the intension of the term is the concept associated with the term and extension of the term is set of things to which the term refers or true of.

<sup>13</sup> Methodological solipsism is the thesis that the mental states of an individual can be individuated exclusively on the basis of that state's relations with other internal states of the individual itself, without any reference to the physical world in which the individual is situated. See Fodor (1980), (1987).

<sup>14</sup> Putnam (1975), P. 226.

<sup>15</sup> Putnam (1975), p. 225.

<sup>16</sup> There is one difficulty with the example of 'water' i.e. if the body is made of water and water is different in two worlds, then Oscar and twin Oscar cannot be identical copies as it is supposed. But this problem is not with other examples given by Putnam like 'elm' and 'beech', etc.

<sup>17</sup> Putnam, (1975), p. 232.

<sup>18</sup> McDowell, (1980), p. 281.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 281.



- 
- <sup>20</sup> Here I am not saying that Putnam has directly argued against these views. My point is to say that if we wish to take Putnam's thesis further in the right direction, then we should consider these points in a very important way.
- <sup>21</sup> Here the fundamental problem is regarding whether the subjectivity of our mental content can be explained entirely in terms of physical terms.
- <sup>22</sup> I am taking strong reductive representationalism in the way various natural sciences describing our experience and our mind in general.
- <sup>23</sup> Tye (2008), p. 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Dretske, (1995), p. 85.
- <sup>25</sup> Thomas Nagel's "What is it like to be a bat?" and Frank Jackson's "What Mary did not know?" are the seminal contributions for this cause.