

# Our Knowledge of the Internal World

## I. Starting in the Middle

Analyze theory-building how we will, we all must start in the middle

W. V. Quine

A. The externalist strategy

B. Four examples of an externalist maneuver:

1. Hume's skeptical solution to the problem of induction
2. Sellars's critique of sense contents
3. Kripke's critique of the description theory of reference
4. Lewis's response to Putnam's Paradox

C. The absolute conception of reality

What Hume's skeptical solution is not:

X (the defender of the skeptical solution): "There is really no such thing as causation, so the world is like a random sequence of states, but it is a sequence that happens (by sheer chance) to have exhibited, up to now, a certain pattern of regularity, *and it will continue to do so* (still by fortuitous coincidence) so we can be confident that our inductive methods will continue to work."

S (the internalist skeptic): "But what reason do you have to be confident that the pattern will continue?"

X: "I can't give you a reason, but I can give you an explanation for my confidence. I am a creature of habit, and the regularity of the pattern up to now has irresistibly caused me to expect it to continue. I can't help having this belief, and it is a good thing too, since I am convinced that the pattern *will* continue."

There is every reason to inquire into the sensory or stimulatory background of ordinary talk of physical things. The mistake comes only in seeking an implicit sub-basement of conceptualization, or of language. . . . Our ordinary language of physical things is about as basic as language gets.

W. V. Quine, *Word and Object*, p. 3

Frege should be criticized for using the term 'sense' in two senses. For he takes the sense of a designator to be its meaning; and he also takes it to be the way its referent is determined. Identifying the two, he supposes that both are given by definite descriptions. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, p. 59

Constraint C is to be imposed by accepting C-theory, according to Putnam. But C-theory is just more theory, more grist for the mill, and more theory will go the way of all theory. . . . [But] C is *not* to be imposed just by accepting C-theory. That is a misunderstanding of what C is. The constraint is *not* that an intended interpretation must somehow make our account of C come out true. The constraint is that an intended interpretation must conform to C itself.

Lewis, "Putnam's paradox", p. 62

Suppose A and B each claim to have some knowledge of the world. Each has some beliefs and moreover has experiences of the world, and ways of conceptualizing it, which have given rise to those beliefs and are expressed in them: let us call all of this together his *representation* of the world (or part of the world). Now . . . A's and B's representations may well differ. If what they both have is knowledge, then it seems to follow that there must be some coherent way of understanding why those representations differ, and how they are related to one another. [To understand how these different representations represent the same reality, one must] form a conception of the world which *contains* A and B and their representations; . . . but this will still itself be a representation, involving its own beliefs, conceptualizations, perceptual experiences and assumptions about the laws of nature. If this is knowledge, then we must be able to form the conception, once more, of how this would be related to some other representation which might, equally, claim to be knowledge; indeed, we must be able to form that conception with regard to *every* other representation which might make that claim.

The dilemma:

On the one hand, the absolute conception might be regarded as entirely empty, specified only as 'whatever it is that these representations represent'. In this case, it no longer does the work that was expected of it. . . . On the other hand, we may have some determinate picture of what the world is like independent of any knowledge or representation in thought; but then that is open to the reflection, once more, that that is only one particular representation of it, our own, and that we have no independent point of leverage for raising this into the absolute representation of reality.

Williams, *Descartes: the Project of Pure Inquiry*, p. 49ff