

### Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* Lecture 6

1. Now Wittgenstein returns to the thought that there is a characteristic experience of reading (*PI* 159). He argues that no such experience is either necessary or sufficient for it. Not *necessary* because one can really *read* something whilst feeling that one is merely repeating what one has off by heart (this is a little bit like the well-known phenomenon of *déjà vu*): *PI* 160a; see also *PI* 168. Not sufficient because one could have all the characteristic sensations of reading but yet not *be* reading: *PI* 160b (though he also says that some people *would* call this ‘reading’).
2. He then turns to the idea that we *derive* the sounds from the words. For we do distinguish between somebody’s deriving the sound from the word and somebody just saying what comes to him. And this distinction is *behavioural*. We say that the learner is ‘deriving’ the sound from the words when (for instance) he shows the behaviour characteristic of derivation: he looks things up in a table, perhaps, and what he says is a function of what is written in the part of the table that he consults, and this is in turn a function of the words that he saw, and perhaps also of when he saw them (*PI* 162b).
3. But there must be more to ‘deriving’ than what there is in this special case of it! For one often derives without a table: isn’t there something in virtue of which *all* such episodes count as deriving? No. It is a family resemblance concept, and so when we remove what is particular about particular instances of it, thinking to find some common element (a mental element) that lay behind them, we ended up with nothing. ‘So we stripped those particular coverings off; but then deriving itself disappeared.—In order to find the real artichoke, we divested it of its leaves’ (*PI* 164).
4. But again that seems wrong, because we want to say that there really *is* an answer as to whether he was reading at any particular time. So Wittgenstein next considers the idea that there is a peculiar experience of deriving: it is the feeling of ‘the word-shapes somehow *causing* our utterance’ (*PI* 169a). Now there is *something* behind this: it is the felt difference between making a noise, say ‘i’, when I see an arbitrary flourish (of the sort at *PI* 166) and making it when I see the written letter ‘i’. In the first case there is a feeling of effort, perhaps; and in the second case a felt *lack* of restraint (*PI* 169c).
5. Wittgenstein is not denying that such a felt difference exists but only our interpretation of it as a difference between being causally influenced and not being causally influenced. For first: the felt lack of restraint that I just mentioned is also there when we say ‘i’ whilst *happening* to look at the flourish: so how can we interpret that feeling as a causal connection (*PI* 169c)? The mistake here is to think that something that we feel when we do the reading in slow-motion, so to speak, is also there (perhaps subliminally) in other cases too. But experience itself teaches that this is not so (cf. *PI* 171c). And second: causation implies the existence of a regular pattern that we can discover by repeated experiment: and how can such a pattern, which is extended in time and space, appear to us all at once (*PI* 169b)? Note that this is a more or less Humean concept of causation; at #7 below we shall see that this point can be contraposed to yield a quite different idea of what causation

itself.

6. Very well: maybe it is not the experience of being *caused* to do something but the experience of being *guided* in a certain direction. Now it is certainly true that somebody can be guided by the words towards uttering the appropriate sounds. But even if we look very carefully at what happens when we read the words slowly: where is the *experience* of guidance (*PI* 170b)? It is salutary at this point to try the experiment of copying a doodle (*PI* 175a). Where is the experience of being guided?
7. Sellars has said that Wittgenstein's discussion of the doodle experiment (*PI* 175-6) takes us to the heart of his entire later philosophy (see R. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein* second edition p. 151). I am not sure what he meant by this but great importance clearly attaches to the following point: that when you are copying the doodle there is nothing baffling; but when you look back it seems at once that there *must* have been guidance going on and yet that there was no *experience* of guidance. And it is this point that lies behind the thought that Wittgenstein will have got from Schopenhauer but which had first occurred to Berkeley, that the *will* is not a *phenomenon*, for nothing in my experience answers to it. And I think it also underlies Berkeley's thought (*PHK* 28) that causation cannot be a relation between the objects of perception but something that we are only aware of through active willing.
8. We now leave reading and return to the examples involving numerical sequences. When you grasp the sequence—as we say 'in a flash'—your characteristic expression of this is 'Now I can go on!' (*PI* 179a). But we have seen that whatever sensation causes you to say this is not one that guarantees a correct continuation of the sequence: you may go on correctly or you may not. Does this mean that 'Now I can go on!' reports a mental state that is contingently connected with a correct continuation of the series? It need not be reporting any mental state but rather it *expresses* one i.e. it is produced by it and is itself a signal of what is to come (*PI* 180).
9. The feeling persists that when you grasp the sequence every step is already taken—your mind has flown ahead and grasped them all (*PI* 188). But do we think of every step *separately* in advance? No: we do this by grasping the principle behind the formula and seeing that we should apply it just the *same* in each case. But now consider the recalcitrant learner (*PI* 185). *He* will say that he was carrying out the order '+2' in the 'same' way at each step.
10. This doesn't mean that we need a new intuition is needed at each step of the series; how would that help? 'If intuition is an inner voice—how do I know *how* I am to obey it?' (*PI* 213b). It is better to say that at each step we take a new decision (*PI* 186): really it is a leap in the dark (*PI* 219c-d). It is as though the *Tractatus* has been turned inside out: instead of meaning being guaranteed by a wholly impersonal logical form it demands human intervention at *every* step; but the saying/showing distinction has left its trace: for the meaning of the signs—e.g. the way that the formula +2 determines its steps in advance—cannot be in anything that it *says* but is exhibited in what we do with it.