

Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* Lecture 7

1. The example at *PI* 185 and the immediately succeeding discussion drove home what was anyway becoming clearer and clearer: that by themselves neither the audible instructions concerning (+2) nor its visible initial segment of it nor any introspectible mental content (the 'intuition' of *PI* 186) can settle how I am to continue it. As he puts it elsewhere: if God had looked into my mind then, He would not have known which continuation I was thinking of. The conclusion is that at each step of the series a decision—or really not even that, rather a sort of leap in the dark—is necessary (see also *On Certainty* 204).
2. It is important to keep in mind that the focus on a single type of example (the mathematical sequence) is quite unnecessary. The same point applies quite generally to all the phenomena of intentionality i.e. cases where some linguistic or mental item can mean something outside itself. Thus for instance an order places a kind of shadow on what follows it: if it is carried out then what is performed is the act that it meant; and if it is *not* carried out then still there is something that it meant—but how can an order mean one thing and not another? (See *PI* 437.) The same question arises about the connection between a sequence and its continuation, or about a description and the situation it describes, or about your drawing someone and the person it was meant to be of (see *PI* 691).
3. Wittgenstein's representative for the mythology that seduces us in all such cases is that of the machine as symbol of its own future action (*PI* 193-5). The point of the analogy is that we are tempted to think of e.g. an order as standing in the same relationship to its own execution in the same way as we think of a machine as standing to the way it is *supposed* to move. Thus think of e.g. a pendulum. A physical object that happens to be a pendulum might move in the way that you would expect a pendulum to move, or it might not. But then what is this 'way that a pendulum is supposed to move', if it is something that does not always happen? The first point, then, is that the motion that we might calculate for the pendulum as such need not be what the physical machine actually does (*PI* 193b).
4. But as well as treating the machine as a real and possibly malfunctioning physical object we can treat it as a *symbol* of its future motion. Thus we might say: this is a pendulum with this length etc. and so (we calculate that) this is how it is going to move. For the purposes of *these* calculations we simply ignore certain possibilities e.g. that the thickness of the cord might interfere with the motion or that the whole contraption might break etc. (*PI* 193a). So there are two different ways of treating this object; we can treat it as a real physical object whose movement we cannot predict for certain; or we can say that it is a pendulum, meaning by this term to specify a certain mathematical idealization.
5. Now the typically philosophical mistake occurs when we cross these two pictures: that is. When we treat the mathematical theory as describing the possibility of movement of a real physical object. And this leads us to misinterpret certain linguistic expressions. That is why we think that somehow

these possibilities of movement are somehow already in it. These illusions arise more specifically as follows. (i) We say that it *has* this possibility of movement: this leads to the illusion that the possibility somehow belongs to the thing (*PI* 194a) and also to the illusion that the possibility is in some sense very like reality (*PI* 194b). (ii) We say that the possible movement is the possibility of this very movement and none other because we only derive one continuation from the machine as symbol. And this leads to the illusion that somehow the machine's initial state stands in a uniquely close relation to certain future movements (*PI* 194b).

6. Perhaps we can see the point of all this if we consider how it applies to somebody who has been taught a series by learning its initial segment. Here we can say that the person in this state corresponds to the machine in its initial condition. And we can treat the initial segment *either* as a symbol of its own future continuation (in which case we will derive a unique series of further steps) *or* as something directly apprehended by the learner (in which case we know that he might continue in any of many different ways). It is when we confuse these that we think that the learner has somehow grasped what we now know he cannot: something that of itself uniquely determines its own future application or continuation. This is the position that later commentators like McDowell and Kripke call *Platonism*: the mythology of the mind-independent and directly graspable meaning that somehow applies directly and without need for interpretation to the empirical world.
7. Another illusion that Wittgenstein discusses in this connection arises from a misunderstanding concerning tense. For the fact that is that when we ordinarily say 'the future use is *now* present to us' we are right in *some* sense. That means: Wittgenstein does not want to stop us from saying things like that. What he wants to stop is the philosophical misunderstanding of it that concludes that meaning is a concurrent mental process or 'intuition' (*PI* 195; see also *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* I, 125d).
8. From that section until the summary of the rule-following discussion at *PI* 201 Wittgenstein returns to the problem that generated the alleged clash between meaning and use in the first place (see *PI* 138). That was supposed to be the conflict between the grasp of meaning—which can allegedly happen in a flash—and the *use*, which is extended in time. The point is that what occurs to your mind in an instant—what he calls the 'interpretation' of the rule—does *not* determine the use (*PI* 198).
9. This is what generates the famous paradox of *PI* 201a—probably the most extensively cited and argued-over passage in all of twentieth-century philosophy. If you think that the only way to grasp a rule is to *have in mind* an *interpretation* then yes, you will have to deny the equation of meaning and use; but you will also have to admit the paradox (not a contradiction but something very hard to believe) that any course of action fits as well with that grasp as any other.
10. The solution to the paradox (*PI* 201b) is that we should not think that an interpretation is the only way to grasp a rule. There is another sense in which

you can be said to grasp a rule: and this is through what you actually do (or presumably are disposed to do).

11. But calling your mere behaviour (or dispositions thereto) 'grasp of a rule' appears simply to be glossing over a serious problem. We are (as McDowell says) accustomed to thinking of rule-following (and other intentional phenomena) in broadly *contractual* or what Kripke calls *normative* terms: when you follow a rule you are being more or less faithful to some pre-existing grasp of the rule that *guides* you. If we are to abandon this picture on pain of the paradox of *PI* 201a are we not really giving up on the notion of meaning altogether? Aren't we committed to saying that really there is *no* such thing as meaning, only the behaviour that it was supposed to be guiding? That is the issue between Kripke (who says yes) and McDowell (who says no).