

### Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* Lecture 9

1. The passages between *PI* 203 and 242 largely go over the ground that we have covered in considering the material up to 202. Amongst other things Wittgenstein stresses (i) the uselessness of thinking that we can reply to the sceptic by insisting that only one continuation constitutes applying the rule in the *same* way (*PI* 214-6; 223b-227); (ii) the bankruptcy of thinking that it is a new ‘intuition’ that we need at every step (*PI* 213b, 222-223a); (iii) the sheer contingency of the fact that we all respond alike to instruction and in ways that can be foreseen (*PI* 233-5).
2. Three other points in this material are worth discussing at slightly greater length. The first concerns *PI* 208e-g. Here Wittgenstein attacks the idea that our inability to peer into infinity is what Russell once called a ‘merely medical’ limitation. He discusses this in the context of an infinite sequence: thus I might say that the number  $\pi = 3.14159\dots$  Here the ellipsis is, he says, *not* an abbreviation: as though there is an infinite expansion that God could write down but of which we can see only the beginning. But why not? And what has this got to do with rule-following?
3. The answer to both questions is that all we are given when  $\pi$  is explained to us is a *rule* for generating the decimal expansion: but just like any rule, that does not by itself determine some correct infinite expansion; it is rather that *we* interpret it ‘blindly’ in the direction that comes naturally to us: even if God had looked into my mind he could not have seen there the infinite expansion that I ‘really meant’. That is also why the ellipsis is not an abbreviation; it is not as though, in understanding  $\pi$ , I understand something beyond what I have just said that for some reason I cannot get across.
4. The second point concerns *PI* 240-2. There Wittgenstein is responding to the objection that on his view everything is a matter of convention, in some sense. For if the application of an expression to any particular case depends on what comes naturally to us, then doesn’t the truth of our sentences depend on this too? But then how can we say, what is surely right, that it is true that the Earth goes around the Sun whatever anybody may think or wish or do? Wittgenstein’s response is, first, that he is not saying this but only that: there is room for disputes about truth and falsity only against a background of general disagreement. You and I might disagree about, say, the number of tiles required to cover the bathroom wall: but this will only count as disagreement over the facts if we are both more or less alike in our more basic patterns of rule-following behaviour (so that neither of us is like the recalcitrant pupil of *PI* 185). The second part of Wittgenstein’s response is that this disagreement is not a matter of us seeing things alike, nor agreement in judgments, but in *form of life*.
5. It is worth saying something more about this expression, whose significance is quite out of proportion to its frequency in the text. The term has already appeared very early on: to imagine a language, Wittgenstein said, is to imagine a form of life (*PI* 19). By the term he must mean something like the basic patterns of behaviour on which we must agree if we are to understand one another. But precisely because it rests language on forms of life in this way

Wittgenstein's later position contains a deep tension that is also present in Kant's Transcendental Idealism and perhaps most spectacularly and explicitly in the *Tractatus* itself. For it now seems as though the very idea of a language itself only makes sense when applied to those with forms of life in common with ours or somehow translatable into ours (this appears to be confirmed at *PI* 207, 237). But then how can it even be intelligible to us that what language we speak depends on our form of life? (This is suggested at *PI* II, xii, which you should read in conjunction with *PI* 240-2). The question crystallizes around the notorious 'lion' remark: if the lion can speak then he must share our form of life; but then why could we not understand him? (*PI* II p. 223: eminent Wittgenstein scholars have actually had punch-ups over this one.)

6. The third passage is the 'bridge' material at *PI* 238-9. As Kripke remarks there are two cases where the rule-following arguments are especially hard to resist. One of these—logic or mathematics—we have already considered. The other is our 'inner' sensational life. It seems as though the presence of a mental image of, say, blue, can tell me how I am to apply the word 'blue' to external objects. Of course this is wrong: and the argument at *PI* 239 essentially repeats the one at 73c. But it also gives Wittgenstein an opportunity to attack a related source of resistance: that at least a mental image can tell me how to apply a word to my own *inner* states. More generally, the idea that I can use words to refer to such states at all is the targets of the private language argument.
7. At *PI* 243 Wittgenstein introduces the idea of a 'private language'. 'Privacy' describes its referents and not its speakers. So a private language in the intended sense is *not* the language of a congenital Robinson Crusoe. It is a language whose terms refer to private states, that is, states that are not *knowable* to anybody other than their owner. Wittgenstein immediately infers (*PI* 243b) that nobody other than the owner of the states can understand the language; but this may be questioned (and it has been: see the work of Edward Craig e.g. 'Meaning, Use and Privacy' *Mind* 1982).
8. From *PI* 244-255 he attacks the idea that our everyday sensation language is a private language in this sense. He starts (*PI* 244a) by explaining what we may take to be his own position about this language and how it differs from a certain form of behaviourism (*PI* 244b). In brief: the sensation language replaces natural expressions of pain and no more *refers* to a private inner state than they do.
9. And even if they did refer to my pain, would they be referring to something that *only I* can know? Wittgenstein thinks not: he argues that this idea is based on a false model: as though there is a locker that only I can look into and whose contents others can only guess at. First he attacks the idea that it even makes sense to say that I know of my own pains. Consider the comparison with intention (*PI* 247). We can say: you know what your intentions are: but this just means that the expression of uncertainty is meaningless. 'I don't know whether I intend to—' is just a lengthy way of saying 'I *don't* intend to—'. Similarly: 'I know I am in pain' adds nothing to 'I am in pain'. But the latter is not an expression of knowledge: for a dog can be in pain and yet it is not as though he knows something that the rest of us do not (*PI* 250). The

surroundings are lacking that would turn it into anything that might be called 'knowledge'. Similarly, in what sense of 'know' can I be said not to know that *somebody else* is in pain? What seems to be lacking is the special kind of certainty that the sufferer seems to have: but we have just seen why this ought not to count as knowledge. There can therefore be third-person knowledge of others' pain: for a third person does not fall essentially short of having something that the first person possesses and which can reasonably be called 'knowledge'.