Philosophical Investigations
Privacy

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Kripke established two conclusions about private languages.

First, we should not ascribe meanings individuals in isolation.

Second, meaning ascriptions are only justified with enough connection to a speech community.

These stop short of radical conclusions like: Robinson Crusoe’s utterances are meaningless.
Talk outline

Wittgenstein’s solution

Wittgenstein on privacy
How did Wittgenstein respond to the rule-following paradox?

That there is a misunderstanding here is shown by the mere fact that in this chain of reasoning we place one interpretation behind another, as if each contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another lying behind it. For what we thereby show is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an interpretation, but which, from case to case of application, is exhibited in what we call “following the rule” and “going against it”. (201)
Wittgenstein’s solution

- There are other, deviant, interpretations of a rule available.
- This doesn’t show that we don’t understand rules, or follow them.
- *We do* use ‘+’ to mean addition.
- *We do* describe the adder as ‘following the rule’.
- *We do* describe the quadder as ‘going against it’.
- These facts are why the rule guides us.
‘Following the rule’

- What manifests grasp of a rule is what is generally called ‘following the rule’ and ‘going against it’.
- I am following a rule if I (at other times) and others (now) would describe me as such.
- How about for applications beyond the range I have considered?

  For example, I’ll teach him to continue an ornamental pattern ‘uniformly’ when told to do so.
  – And also to continue progressions. That is, for example, when given: . . . . . to go on: . . . . . . . . . . .

  I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him by expressions of agreement, rejection, expectation, encouragement. I let him go his way, or hold him back; and so on. (208)
‘Following the rule’

- E.g. I say ‘and so on’, ‘this and similar things’, or I use ellipsis.
- But doesn’t this miss something out?
- The interlocutor asks: ‘Don’t you leave him to guess the essential thing?’ (210)
- Wittgenstein says not:

  “He guesses what I mean” would amount to: “various interpretations of my explanation come to his mind, and he picks one of them”. So in this case he could ask; and I could and would answer him. (210)

- For my audience to guess, many interpretations would occur to them.
- But they don’t: they merely continue as you wished.
This talk of guessing gains nothing.

At some point, the giving of reasons will give out:

Well, how do I know? – If that means “Have I reasons?”, the answer is: my reasons will soon give out. And then I shall act, without reasons. (211)

We do not hesitate when continuing a series.

We just do respond in some ways rather than others.

This is instinctive rather than rational.
Something animal

- Wittgenstein concludes:
  
  *When I follow a rule, I do not choose.*
  
  *I follow the rule blindly.* (219)

- That following a rule is instinctive shouldn’t knock our confidence.

- Though we may be surprised that this is the case even in mathematics.

- Similarly, *On Certainty*:
  
  *I want to see it as something that lies beyond being justified or unjustified; as it were, as something animal.* (359)

- See John McDowell’s ‘Wittgenstein on following a rule’ (1984) for more.
Wittgenstein’s solution

- Kripkenstein offered a sceptical solution.
- Wittgenstein isn’t quite doing that.
- He seems to reject a basic assumption of the rule-following paradox: that following a rule is rational.
- The rule-following sceptic seeks a fact in virtue of which it is rational to mean addition by ‘+’.
- It isn’t rational; it is animal.
§§203-42 essentially summarise themes from the rule-following discussion.

We will focus on two points.

First, we have seen Wittgenstein’s discussion of ellipsis for ‘and so on’.

But consider its usage in: \( \pi = 3.14159... \)

He is clear that this is not an abbreviation (208).

Why not?
Ellipsis

- $\pi$ provides us with a *rule*.
- But, like any rule, it does not determine a unique infinite expansion.
- We interpret the rule in the way that most naturally strikes us.
- My understanding of $\pi$ is not something beyond its initial expansion that I cannot get across.
- That’s why it is not an abbreviation.
Second, is everything a matter of convention on Wittgenstein’s view?

The use of words depends on what comes naturally to us.

How about truth?

He thinks there is room for debates about truth/ falsity but only against background agreement.

We can disagree about, say, the number of rooms in the Lecture Block, but only if our behaviour is sufficiently similar.
These basic patterns of behaviour that we must share he calls ‘forms of life’.

We are invited to consider an alien language:

there is no regular connection between what they say, the sounds they make, and their activities ...
Are we to say that these people have a language: orders, reports, and so on?
There is not enough regularity to call it “language”.

Hence the famous:

If a lion could talk, we wouldn’t be able to understand it. (PPF, §327)
Talk outline

Wittgenstein’s solution

Wittgenstein on privacy
Privacy

- Kripke followed Wittgenstein in turning to private language after the rule-following considerations.
- Let’s start with some background.
- Since Descartes, the dominant view was of the mental as something *private*.
- The external world is public.
- But your internal life is inaccessible.
- Locke thought that our words referred to private *ideas*.
- And verificationism takes meaning as being about immediate sensational experiences.
Wittgenstein introduces the notion of a private language at §243.

He means a language, similar to Locke’s, whose terms refer only to private states.

This is *not* the language of Robinson Crusoe.

These states are knowable only to their owner.

For Wittgenstein, only the owner could *understand* the language:

*The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know – to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.* (243)
Edward Craig, ‘Meaning and Privacy’ (1997) objects to Wittgenstein’s argument:

1. The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know – to his immediate private sensations.

∴ 2. Another person cannot understand the language.

Craig takes 1. to be an expression of the idea that a language can be *epistemically privileged*.

2. expresses that the language is *idiolectic*.

He refutes it by an example of a language that is epistemically privileged but not idiolectic.
Consider an epistemically privileged language.
Another can still have true beliefs about this language.
Let’s say Jane and Jean are two identical twins.
Jane uses ‘apple’ to mean apples.
Jean uses ‘apple’ to mean tomatoes.
One of them phones me and asks for ‘five red apples’.
I don’t know who phoned me.
I guess it was Jane and that she wants five red apples.
As it happens, I am correct.

I get the five red apples, and Jane is happy.

It seems I had a true belief about Jane’s meaning.

It seems I understood the instruction.

It seems the communication was successful.

Nevertheless, my true belief stops short of knowledge: I was lucky.

So the language was not idiolectic.

In short, communication/understanding can obtain without knowledge.
We will mean the following by a private language:

A language whose terms refer to private, internal, sensational states.

Wittgenstein spends §§244–55 arguing against their possibility.

He is clear that his view is not behaviourist:

“So you are saying that the word ‘pain’ really means crying?” – On the contrary: the verbal expression of pain replaces crying, it does not describe it. (244)

‘Pain’ does not refer to pain.
Wittgenstein starts with *our* language.

Let’s say that my sensational terms refer to private entities.

Does this suggest that only I can know the referents?

No: this presupposes that your mind is a container whose contents only you can inspect.

And this presupposes that others can only guess.

Wittgenstein thinks that it makes little sense to say that you know of your *own* pains.
Intention

- He considers a comparison with *intentions*:
  
  “Only you can know if you had that intention.” One might tell someone this when explaining the meaning of the word “intention” to him. For then it means: that is how we use it.
  
  (And here “know” means that the expression of uncertainty is senseless.) (247)

- You can be certain of your intentions.
- ‘I know what my intentions are’ is trivial.
- ‘I don’t know whether I intend to ... ’ simply abbreviates ‘I don’t intend to ...’.
- And similarly for pain.
Pain

Talk of our sensational states is similarly trivial:

\[ \text{The sentence “Sensations are private” is comparable to “One plays patience by oneself”.} \quad (248) \]

It makes no sense to wonder whether you are in pain:

\[ \text{What does it mean when we say, “I can’t imagine the opposite of this” or “What would it be like if it were otherwise?” – For example, when someone has said that my mental images are private; or that only I myself can know whether I am feeling pain; and so forth.} \quad (250) \]

‘I know I am in pain’ is either false or trivial.

I can be certain of my pain, as of my intentions.
Why might we think otherwise?

We use these words to fend off something whose form produces the illusion of being an empirical proposition, but which is really a grammatical one. (25)

‘I don’t know if I’m in pain’ is perfectly grammatical.

And grammar can mislead as to whether anything substantial is being said.

But it is, for Wittgenstein, senseless.

It is the task of the philosopher to cure these grammatical confusions:

The philosopher treats a question; like an illness. (255)
Where have we got to?

A private language, for Wittgenstein, is an inner, sensory, language.

The arguments of §§244-55 seek to show that our language is not a private language.

But *could* there be a private language, even if not ours?

This is where he turns next.