

WITTGENSTEIN *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS* LECTURE 10

1. There are various interpretations of PI 258: I'll mention three. The *verificationist* interpretation is that there is no way for the private diarist to check that uses of 'S' are really faithful to his initial definition. If it is replied that I can always check against my memory, the answer is that there is no way to tell that I have remembered the sign *right* (cf. PI 265): the implicit idea being that no verification of one's use of 'S' can confer the latter with meaning unless it too can be checked.
2. The trouble with this interpretation is that it applies equally, and equally destructively, to private *and* public uses of language. If I have to trust my memory in the private sector I also have to trust it in the public sector: *every* use of words can only be justified by an ultimate appeal to memory (see Ayer, 'Could there be a private language' from PASSV 28 (1954)).
3. The second interpretation of PI 258 looks back to the treatment of ostensive explanation in the late 20s and early 30s of PI. There we saw that just concentrating on an object (public or private) and uttering a noise is not enough to tell anyone that the noise stands for any one of the many types to which the object belongs; nor (as we also saw there) is it enough to make it true that you then *mean* the ostension to stand for one of them. What is needed to make it true is the external 'stage-setting' that accompanies ostension in the public case but *not* in the private case. (See B. Stroud in Charles and Child, ed., *Wittgensteinian Themes*; M. McGinn in *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*.)
4. However it isn't clear why there is anything essentially public about this 'stage setting'. Isn't it enough, for the ostensive definition to be successful, simply that it *brings it about* that the speaker uses 'S' on the right occasions, that is, on occasions when he suffers *the same sensation* as the original one? (This is effectively the proposal for 'number' in PI 29b-c.) As long as this is *in fact* the case, why do we (or he) need any further criterion that it is so?
5. The third interpretation takes a hint from PI II, xi (PPF 214): 'Always get rid of the idea of the private object in this way: assume that it constantly changes, but that you don't notice the change because your memory constantly deceives you.' There is nothing in the linguistic behaviour of the private diarist to distinguish the hypothesis that by 'S' he means *the sensation type that originally occurred* from the hypothesis that by 'S' he means *his present memory image of that type*. This would remain true even if we could see into his mind. So the 'private ostensive definition' does nothing to make it true that he is referring to the original sensation type rather than to his memory image of it.
6. On this reading the PLA is a sort of underdetermination argument. There is nothing in the linguistic behaviour of the speaker (where this however *includes* his 'inner behaviour') in virtue of which his 'S' is referring to the initial type in the past as opposed to his present

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memory image of it. One way around the objection is to imagine that the diarist can compare putative occurrences of S with other sensations that typically accompany it. This is how we secure reference to *external* particulars against the same sort of underdetermination. In that case the argument does establish something: what it establishes is what Kant's Refutation of Idealism establishes on a phenomenalist reading (J. Bennett in *Kant's Analytic* explicitly compares the RI to the PLA on just these lines).

7. *The Beetle in the Box*. Another line of thought against the Lockean conception is the famous argument at *PI* 293b. This bears a resemblance to Frege's idea that what he called the idea associated with a term has no bearing on its sense: people who 'attach' different ideas to a term may mean the same thing by it. Whilst the conclusion—that the thing in the box 'cancels out, whatever it is'—does indeed follow if one assumes that there is no more to a term's meaning than its *public* use, its reliance on that premise makes it impotent against its most obvious target: Locke. Somebody who thought that meaning had an ineradicably private (i.e. *unknowable*) component, which was the essential thing that it served to *communicate*, would never have granted the premise in the first place.
8. Waiving that point, another trouble with the argument is that it makes no evident distinction between the public case and the private case. It is just as plausible that the reference of terms in public languages have no bearing on *their* senses (if by that we mean something that supervenes on the public use of sentences containing those names). Quine has established this point for public languages (see e.g. 'Things and their place in theories' in *Theories and Things*. I discuss it in ch. 2 s. 4.1.3 of my Witt. book.) From the Quinean point of view *PI* 293 is a parochial application of an argument that has no special force against *private* language.
9. A reader of *PI* 244-5 can easily get the impression that Wittgenstein is some sort of behaviourist: there is no such thing as pain or sensational life without behaviour. He certainly wants to avoid being thought of in that way: rather, his view is that only of what behaves in a certain way *can we say that*: it feels pain, etc. (*PI* 281). But this raises the question: what have sensational ascriptions got to do with anything other than the behaviour that they presuppose?
10. At *PI* 283a Wittgenstein asks: 'What gives us *so much as the idea* that living beings, things, can feel?' This launches an extended inquiry whose purpose can be seen in part as a reply to the question that *PI* 281 raised. He is trying to get clear on how the feeling itself enters into the language game of pain; this question (and the analogous one for meaning) haunts the remainder of the book.