

## WITTGENSTEIN *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS* LECTURE 8

1. Kripke's *W* takes the sceptical position that there is no such thing as meaning. But for the real *W* it is perfectly all right to say things like 'I meant addition by "plus" all along' (*PI* 195). *K* accommodates this by proposing what he calls (following Hume) a *sceptical solution* to the sceptical paradox. The solution is sceptical because it accepts the paradox; it is a solution because it makes a place for talk of meaning, as follows. Kripke's *W* rejects the *truth*-conditional reading of meaning ascriptions in favour of an *assertibility*-conditions analysis (WRPL 73, cf. *PI* 180). When we say that you mean such-and-such by so and so we are not even attempting to describe any facts; but what we say is *assertable* just in case your use of (say) 'plus' has agreed with mine hitherto (WRPL 91). But my license to make that assertion will expire if you go on to use 'plus' in a deviant way (WRPL 92-3).
2. If that is the role that meaning ascriptions play in our lives then there is no place for such ascriptions except in a community. That, *K* says, is the conclusion of *W*'s *private language argument*: the argument is essentially over by *PI* 202 (which states it) and the later discussions of it (e.g. *PI* 258, 265) are simply elaborations or special cases of the basic point that there is no idiolectic basis for meaning ascriptions (WRPL 3).
3. There are two reasons to doubt that this is really what *W* can have meant. The first is to do with his theory of truth. According to *W* the aptness or otherwise of a statement for truth-value carries no metaphysical weight; and the same is presumably true about 'factuality' (it would have been entirely in character for him to say that 'It is a fact that  $p$ ' =  $p$ ; cf. *PI* 136). So if *W* really thinks it's OK to say 'I meant addition then', he must also agree to 'It's a *fact* that I meant addition then'. But then he cannot be represented as accepting the sceptical *denial* of just this claim. (*K* is aware of this point: see WRPL 86 for a somewhat confusing and unsatisfactory discussion.)
4. The second reason is that Kripke's *W* would not have written the paragraph that *immediately follows* the statement of the sceptical paradox (*PI* 201b): 'It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here...' This suggests *W* does not accept the sceptical solution. But then: how *can* he make room for anything recognizable as meaning?
5. McDowell's paper ('*W* on following a rule', *Synthese* 1984) cites *PI* 201b against *K* (M 331) and answers the next question. The natural response to the positive suggestion in *PI* 201b is: 'Surely all we have here is brute behaviour!—How can *that* add up to meaning?' *M* clearly has sympathy with the second part of this protest (M 350) but not with the first. Brute behaviour—vocalizations and feelings of constraint or freedom—is *not* all that we have here.
6. For you *can* say something and mean it; and what makes it true that you can mean it is that you have been trained in what *M* calls a communal practice or *custom*. Acting within a community *is* what it is

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for linguistic activity to owe allegiance to a pre-existing standard; and that is what makes an utterance into a genuinely meaningful judgment (and not the hidden goings-on in an inner or mental realm): M 352. In favour of this M. cites *PI* 208-10. There *W* appears to say that you don't *guess* the next step in the sequence and even (perhaps) that your knowledge really *does* reach beyond any of the particular instances. But how can this be true? It can be true of you *if* your training, and your utterances, take place in the right context (M 354).

7. Again, M thinks that it is true that one can grasp the whole meaning of a word 'in a flash': but he allows that to take a third-personal reading. For McDowell *W* is saying (and this is clearest at *PI* 151) that you can see *somebody else's* meaning in a flash: and he really thinks that it is true too (M 354-5).
8. But how can this be: don't we see the *same* behaviour whether it takes place in a communal context or any other? No, says M: we can really be said to experience what somebody means if we belong to the same community as him. 'Shared membership in a linguistic community... equips us to make our minds available to one another, by confronting one another with a different exterior from that which we present to outsiders' (M 350). Here M makes contact with Hegel (and reaches a polar opposition to Quine).
9. 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).
10. Two other points in this material are worth discussing. The first concerns *PI* 208e-g. Here *W* 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 *not* an abbreviation: it is not 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?
11. 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 *inside me* 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

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understanding  $\pi$ , I understand something beyond what I have just said that for some reason I cannot get across.

12. The second point concerns *PI* 240-2. There *W* is responding to the objection that on his view everything is a matter of convention. 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?
13. *W*'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 only counts as *disagreement* 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 *W*'s response is that this agreement is not a matter of *seeing* or *judging* things alike: it is an agreement in *form of life*.
14. It is worth saying something more about this expression, whose significance is quite out of proportion to its frequency in the text. It had already appeared early on: 'to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life' (*PI* 19). By the term he means the basic patterns of behaviour on which we must agree if we are to understand one another.
15. Because it rests language on forms of life, *W*'s later position contains a deep tension that is also there in the *Tractatus* (and in Kant's transcendental idealism). The 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 (see *PI* 207, 237). But then how can it be intelligible 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 in 1st & 2d ed./p. 190 in 3d ed./PPF 327 in 4th ed.)