

WITTGENSTEIN *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS* LECTURE 9

1. Philosophy of mind between about the mid seventeenth-century and WW2 followed a roughly Cartesian paradigm on which mental life is somehow 'inner'. Not *literally*: it isn't as though e.g. your sensational life, like your digestive life, goes on inside a part of your body that everyone could see via surgery or X-ray. The contrast between inner and outer is not spatial but epistemic.
2. On the one hand there is the physical or 'external' world to which everyone has equally good access, at least in principle. It may be that different persons have different kinds of access to different parts of that world e.g. other people must resort to sight to determine the position of your limbs; whereas you can tell their position by a different means. But still other people can find out with confidence by the one means what you can find out with no more certainty by the other. And anyway there is no reason in principle why you could not even determine the position of *someone else's* arms by proprioception.
3. On the other hand there is the 'inner' world of our mental life: and here by 'mental' I will usually mean sensational. On the Cartesian picture you do have a special kind of knowledge of your own mental life. How painful is a pinprick to you? What do strawberries taste like? Others must rely on whatever clues your behaviour etc. gives them: you can tell immediately, by a kind of direct and also infallible inner vision.
4. In fact the third-personal position threatens to fall into complete ignorance and not just a lower grade of knowledge than that available from the first personal perspective. There is nothing from the third personal perspective that rules out the Lockean fantasy of the inverted spectrum (*Essay* II.xxxii.15); since nothing rules it out we don't even have a reasonable belief that it does not obtain. But then the epistemic contrast could not be sharper: absolute knowledge for the first person; total ignorance for the third.
5. We should make explicit one element of the Cartesian picture that was implicit in the account so far. It is the idea of a self that somehow 'owns' these sensations. The idea of such a self seems to be essential for understanding the contrast between first and third persons in the first place. The self is not your body or your brain: it is the thing that has some special relation to all the sensations that you call *yours*. Without the idea that there are selves that somehow both 'own' and 'know' 'their' sensational states we can make little sense of the epistemic asymmetry that is at the heart of the Cartesian picture.
6. It is also worth mentioning one further element of the picture that explains its special interest to Wittgenstein. This is the idea that the contents of our inner life (or types of such contents) are the referents of the terms of our sensational language. This was indeed the Lockean semantics not only for sensational terms but for all terms. It was also a *possible* interpretation of the 'simple names' of the *Tractatus*: they are to denote 'private' elements of my sensory field, their colours etc. But in

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any case we can reasonably add to the Cartesian picture the idea that 'pain', 'the taste of strawberries', 'what red looks like' etc. refer to these private inner states.

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 (E. Craig 'Meaning, Use and Privacy'—*Mind* 1982). The Lockean conception of communication plainly allows for linguistic understanding in the presence of this sort of ignorance.
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—'.
10. Wittgenstein's argument at *PI* 248 and at 250-1 appears to be this: that it is either false or meaningless to say that you know whether you are in pain because that is a grammatical proposition—something that describes the 'grammar' of the words because 'I don't know I'm in pain' is senseless. But it is hardly clear why propositions that are 'grammatical' in this sense shouldn't for all that be *true*. After all it would make no sense to say 'It isn't raining' when you are standing in the middle of a thunderstorm: and yet it is still true to say 'It *is* raining' (though Wittgenstein might even dispute that: at least the remark at *PI* 278 suggests it—see also *On Certainty* 347-68).
11. What the discussion at *PI* 244-255 tries to establish about private language is that our ordinary sensation-language is not an actual example of it. But this still leaves open the possibility of an idiosyncratic language (or an idiosyncratic interpretation of the everyday one—cf. *PI* 263, 278, 280) that *did* behave in this way; Wittgenstein therefore directs the main part of his argument against that possibility.