

Private language argument: Such a language is not a personal code, nor a language which is used to speak to oneself, nor even a language spoken by only one person. It is not a language which is unshared as a matter of fact, but one which is unsharable and which is unshared and unteachable in principle, because its words refer to what can only be known to the speaker, namely his immediate private experiences.

"But could we also imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experience - his feeling, his moods, and the rest - for his private use? - Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language? - But that is not what I mean. The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language."(section 243, Philosophical Investigations)

We can deduce from sections 243 to around 317 that Wittgenstein considers the idea of a private language to be impossible, and even in an event where possible, incoherent. It's rather difficult to follow his line or argument as there isn't really one in an explicit, linear sense; ideas and their constituents veer off waywardly and are returned to sporadically throughout the sixty or so points. From early readings one does have suspicions of Wittgenstein's actual intention; did he really know what it was he was onto? Or was he simply playing around with different idea strands in the hope that some connections could be made? He is quoted, however, as saying that he didn't believe man at the time was capable, or ready, of understanding/comprehending his ideas. It is, nonetheless, slightly burdensome that there exist numerous explanations as to his intentions: attacking behaviourism, memory scepticism, or defending the community view of language rules and meaning (the most likely, it seems), to name a few but perhaps not all.

Wittgenstein's main argument, it could be said, runs from section 256 through 261, continuing to section 273 where he last mentions private language, and even further on with thoughts on sensations until section 317. I admit difficulties in picking apart his interconnected strands of thought. Here, I will try to summarize the arguments he seems to be making: 1. The difficulties in private definition without reliance on public language, and 2. Private sensations.

Wittgenstein says we require language rules in order ascertain correctness in language use, and this proves to be a major, if not fatal, stumbling block for a private language user. We need the rules to help us be sure when a rule is followed or when it is broken, and for this it would be necessary for someone other than the speaker to be the judge. Now, a private language user would not be able to use public words to describe 'S', since this would result in 'S' becoming public. A private language user might then turn to attempting to ostensively define 'S' - defining by pointing. Other than, as Wittgenstein says, the silliness of *pointing* to something you already know exists (you can feel 'S', why would you then *point* to it?), there is no possibility of verifying that one is indeed correct in one's application of 'S'. The private language left to depend on his memory of the sensation 'S' would, as Wittgenstein puts it, have to accept what appears to be 'S' whether or not it actually was. This is the incoherency; the private language user could, in an extreme case, be referring to completely different sensations as 'S', thinking that they were the original 'S', but, equally extreme, they could may well be correct time and time again in their identification of 'S'. Thus, it follows that a private language user is unable to define 'S' in any meaningful way.

In sections 244 - 317, expertly blended in with his arguments on private definition, Wittgenstein is trying to answer questions on how words refer to sensations (S244) and the way in which sensations are private (S246). He puts it to us that the word 'pain' is not describing the sensation *pain* but is an expression of it. He goes on, perhaps misleadingly, to say that sensations themselves are indeed private in sections 246-51. He says that meaning is determined by the practice of rule following. If a person uses the word 'red' in all observable ways as others do, then he knows the meaning of it even if he associates different sensations with the word. Thus, it follows, that a private sensation has no relevance to the meaning of the word 'red'. This is also where the attack on behaviourism is thought to be, which itself was against the idea that private thoughts and sensations existed.

Wittgenstein 'beetle-in-the-box' thought experiment(Section 293) provides yet more strength to this particular argument, suggesting that public words, when used to refer to inner sensations, only tell us that a sensation is present and not what it is. The word 'beetle' cannot be referring to the beetle itself.

There can, however, be an objection to his 'sensations are private' stance: I can only feel my sensations, no-one else's. I can only know someone's sensations by experiencing them, which isn't possible (yet). The sensation itself is the meaning of the sensation as the speaker uses it and no-one can know the meaning as the speaker uses it, thus the meaning of the sensation word could be said to be private.

In the aforementioned sections Wittgenstein does weave a fairly convincing argument against the existence of a private language, even if we are severely constrained, due to it not explicitly arguing or defending a case, in attempting to critically analyze it. In section 243, I encountered the natural instinct to think about how a private language would be *deciphered* by someone else. I wanted to think about ways one could attempt to understand a private language user, something which is not really covered in his arguments, and I still wonder whether it would yield any further insight. In section 243, again, he says "the individual words of the language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking, to his private sensations." The only way this would be possible if every word in the private language referred to his or her sensations, and it must follow that no such language could have grammatical structure. This, to me, renders his thoughts on private definitions and private sensations, certainly in relation to his private language argument, superfluous, if not for their own standalone merits. Aptly, Wittgenstein is quoted: "Don't get involved in partial problems, but always take flight to where there is a free view over the whole *single* great problem, even if this view is still not a clear one."