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Pathways to Philosophy: Program D, Philosophy of Language

Language of the World, Essay Questions 4-6

Can the solipsist be refuted? The solipsist, no; to everyone else, yes.

Wittgenstein Assignment #2

We can assume we have a mind. It is all that we have to perceive anything. It does not matter if it is a thought inside our heads or something we believe is “out there.” In essence, we use just one set of “goggles.”

We were born with these goggles, for better or worse. The solipsist would argue that all we see is what is in our heads. But the goggles are there for us to see and so they can be adjusted, by us or by a particular context, including the closed context of an academic discipline. If that is true, then it is not a reach to say any “disciple” in that venue can also do the job, the professor, as well as the psychiatrist, the optometrist, the physician, the dentist can all affect how we see things through our goggles.

Again, our solipsist would say these characters are all in our heads and we cannot know for sure that they are out there. On the other hand, we cannot be aware of being truly alone if it were not for the absence of some other: a place, person, context would normally be present.

Unfortunately, the impact of the other cannot be measured and yet without it, we cannot adjust our goggles to determine what is or is not. This phenomenon is the result of not only the external context of the other or her public language and is what we “see” with our goggles. We know the goggles are adjusted for the coal miners, the educator, or the lawyer; they will see things differently (in their minds, they believe uniquely, regardless of hearing the same thing).

This external or public language then becomes part of the mind as seen through their lenses. For example, coal miners as well as other special interest groups develop their own solipsistic slang or argot pertaining to their work. It does not take long for this language to go private, and have a direct bearing on how the miner attempts to interpret things at home. Years ago, the military used to say, when confronted with soldiers experiencing domestic challenges, “Well, if the Air Force wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one.” At one point, in monitoring soldiers’ health and well-being, there would be “short-arm inspections” to monitor venereal disease. What was external scuttlebutt becomes part of the soldiers’ vernacular. In prison, like the Eskimos and their snow, there are many more adjectives or names for types of homosexuals than we know.

Professional language is not very far from this practice. Doctoral dissertation topics such as “Panic Inducing: Data Mining, Fairness, and Privacy,” distract future education leaders from creative leadership while politically-charged, race-based studies take them even further afield. We know it is probably politically-incorrect to say the blind is leading the blind, but that appears to be an acceptable standard for allowing a future president to place “Dr.” in front of her name and run a multi-million-dollar institution at taxpayers’ expense. Let us not forget other, ‘rigorous’, for-real recent Education solipsistic dissertation topics:

Reducing Stereotyping among 4th through 6th Grade Students by Strengthening Self-Esteem, Interpersonal Relationships, and Multicultural Appreciation

The Effects of Adult Perspective-Taking on the Elementary Principal

Learning from Experience: A Critical, Collective Process Following International Short-Term Travel

The role of sustainability in learning and teaching in secondary schools to transform the soul of education

Despite the ardent solipsist’s belief that only she can be the one to discover what is going on inside her mind or outside, that is false. It is apparent that the contextual public language, not the private language, conveys her “knowledge” of her field. It may be vacuous, filled with clichés, etc., but she can fortunately talk to herself (as easily as she can to her colleagues) and be understood, given Education’s limited and faddish, programmable jargon.

The solipsist may be talking to herself internally about what seems to be out there, but the choice of “topics” are already programmed by others. They are the purveyors of her “public language.”

All of this implies external manipulation to our goggles and inserts a world of ideas into our minds. We seem to be persuaded that our minds are to be blank tablets filled in by putative experts. In the closed field of Education, one need only obtain a degree in Education to build a foundation to becoming one of these experts. Since Educating is a praxis and not an academic discipline, there are few theories or practices agreed upon to provide any type of catechism for future practitioners.

An “expert” preaching to an academically-bankrupt audience of educators easily convinces one to think a certain way. Slogans or aphorisms are embedded, “working together: two plus two can make five,” or this is an example of a universal “best practice” making our institution a “world class institution.” Of course, like the coal miners, these practices or observations carry little weight in other settings. But with limited linguistically analytic tools, educators pull up their warm blankets of empty slogans and clichéd “findings” and drive on.