

Philosophy 208
The Language Revolution
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Class 21
Wrapping Up The Private Language Argument

Not a Something Not a Nothing

“But you will surely admit that there is a difference between pain-behavior accompanied by pain and pain-behavior without any pain?” - Admit it? What greater difference could there be? - “And yet you again and again reach the conclusion that the sensation itself is a *nothing*.” - Not at all. It is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either! The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said (*Philosophical Investigations* §304).

Identity and Sensation

- What is the criterion for the sameness of two images? - What is the criterion for the redness of an image? For me, when it is someone else's image: what he says and does. For myself, when it is my image: nothing. And what goes for "red" also goes for "same" (*Philosophical Investigations* §377).
- At these words I form this image. How can I *justify* this?
- Has anyone shewn me the image of the colour blue and told me that *this* is the image of blue?
- What is the meaning of the words: "*This* image"? How does one point to an image? How does one point twice to the same image? (*Philosophical Investigations* §382).

Rules and Communities

- Wittgenstein's claim is that the terms of our language are closely connected to their rules for use; meaning is use.
- A private language would entail private rules for using that language.
- But a rule is essentially an artifact of a community.
- “It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which someone obeyed a rule. It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which a report was made, an order given or understood; and so on. - To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions)” (*Philosophical Investigations* §199).
- Crusoe and *Cast Away* are isolated physically, but not apart from our conventions.

Conventionality and Mathematics

- Traditionally, we think of mathematics as completely independent of our interests or conventions.
- Two and five are seven, independently of us.
- Mathematical facts are like transcendent physical facts, like the earth's revolution around the sun and unlike the fact that we drive on the right-hand side of the road.
- For Wittgenstein, controversially, mathematics is conventional.

Conventionalism in *On Certainty*

- The apparent transcendence of mathematical claims is something like a logical fact about those sentences.
- The logic is a kind of limit on our language game.
 - “I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false. The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules” (*On Certainty* §94-§95).
- Logical propositions include Moore’s ‘I know that here is a hand’.
 - Or, ‘No one has stood on the surface of the sun.’
- They serve as a river bed on which ordinary empirical propositions flow.
- We can use them to teach the use of certain terms.
- We can say that sentences like ‘There are physical objects’ are senseless as a way of teaching the term physical objects.
- Similarly, we can say ‘ $5+7=12$ ’ as a way of teaching the rules of arithmetic, but not to say anything about objects like 5, 7, and 12.

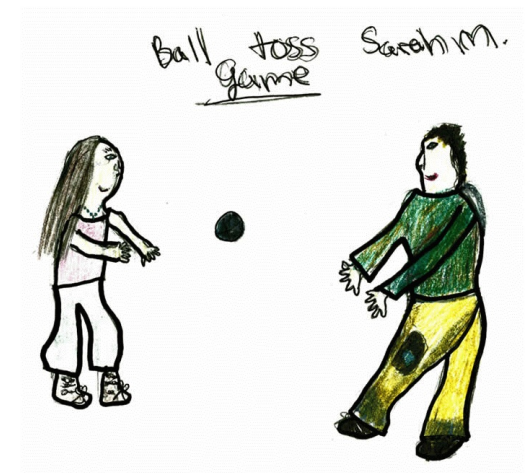


Learning Rules

- The ordinary understanding of conventional rules is that they are learned by induction over experience.
- We see a few examples and then come to a general (inductive) rule.
- Wittgenstein believes that we do not so much derive the general rule from the few instances, but use the rule as a way of organizing the instances.
- We don't learn propositions one at a time; we take on a system as a whole.
- How could you convince some one that you knew that $5+7=12$?
 - You would have to convince them that you knew something much wider than that one proposition.
- When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole.) It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another *mutual* support (*On Certainty*, §141 - §142)

Revenge of Locke on Communication

- Locke's picture of language takes communication to be like playing catch.
 - B1. I hold the ball in my hands.
 - B2. Then, I toss the ball.
 - B3. Lastly, you catch and hold the ball
- Analogously, when we communicate:
 - C1. I have a sensation, which I label with a word: apple, ball, cat.
 - C2. Then, I speak: The cat ate an apple.
 - C3. Lastly, you associate my words with some inner sensations of your own.
- Wittgenstein's private language argument (PLA) takes this view to be utterly misguided.
- Still, we have thoughts.
 - They are not a nothing.
- We communicate our thoughts.
- Someone might believe that we could provide an account of meaning based on our thoughts, if not our sensations.



Frank and Mercy on Grice