

**Phil/Ling 375: Meaning and Mind**  
**[Handout #3]**

Wittgenstein: from *Philosophical Investigations*

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**§ I. Meaning and Word**

<b>View 1</b>	<b>Augustine</b>	Every word has a meaning. This meaning is the object for which the word stands.
<b>View 2</b>	<b>Locke</b>	Every word has a meaning. This meaning is the idea in the speaker's mind.
<b>View 3</b>	<b>Wittgenstein</b>	Only sentences in use have meanings. Sentences have the same meaning when they have the same use.

**Two fundamental questions about language-learning:**

**(1) How can it be possible to learn a language?**

**(2) How can one speaker be sure that other speakers attach the same meaning as he does to expressions in their common language?**

<b>View 1</b>	A child learns language through “ostensive definition” — pointing and naming.
<b>View 2</b>	A child learns language through forming ideas in her mind, but the same words could signify different ideas in different people's minds. For example, a child's conception of 'gold' is different from that of the adults, so the word 'gold' would signify different ideas in the child's speech.
<b>View 3</b>	A child learns language through learning to follow the rules of the language-game.

**§ II. Wittgenstein's Theory of Language-game**

**\_\_ Language is a game of rule-following. You are in the game whether you know how to follow the rules of this game.**

1. A language-game is *a form of life*; it is a system of moves which fit one another, and which exclude other moves.
2. We should seek for the meaning of a word not by looking for some object corresponding to it, but by examining its use in discourse.
3. The only guarantee there could possibly be that others understand words as I understand them is agreement in use.
4. At the most fundamental level, agreement about meaning is agreement about what to do in certain circumstances.
5. Sentences have the same meaning when they have the same *use*.
6. Learning a language is learning a set of ways of manipulating the world, into which linguistic moves fit in various ways. It is not necessary at first for the child to learn either world meanings or sentence meanings, because what he has to learn first is

something more fundamental than either, in which both are rooted: a way of proceeding.

7. *It is our acting which lies at the bottom of the language-game.*

The conception of a language game allows Wittgenstein to answer two of the most puzzling questions about language:

- (3) How can it be possible to learn a language?**
- (4) How can one speaker be sure that other speakers attach the same meaning as he does to expressions in their common language?**

- ❖ There are multiple tools in language and they have different *uses*. (Ostensive learning is only one of such uses.)
- ❖ Examples of language-games:
  - Giving orders
  - Describing things
  - Constructing an object from descriptions
  - Reporting an event
  - Speculating about an event
  - Forming and testing a hypothesis
  - Presenting the results
  - Making up a story
  - Guessing riddles
  - Making a joke
  - Solving a problem
  - Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying....

### § III. The Possibility of A Private Language

**Q: What does it mean to have a private language?**

= **[I] Can the meaning of a word be identified with a private entity?**

**\* Claim #1 (derivable from Locke): language is private because the meanings of words are private — they are ideas in the mind.**

#### **[First Argument for Private Language]**

1. Ideas are private in the sense that
  - i) We can only know ideas in our own minds, and
  - ii) Others cannot know directly the ideas in our minds (they do not have cognitive access to our ideas).
2. The meaning of a word in our repertoire is the idea that the word stands for in our minds.
3. Therefore, the meanings of the words we use are private.

#### **[Cook's formulation of the argument]:**

1. No one can feel (experience) another person's sensations.

2. The proper and necessary means of coming to know what sensation another person is having is to feel that person's sensation.
  3. Therefore, no one can know what sensation another person is having.
  4. The sensation is the meaning of the sensation-word in the speaker's utterance.
  5. Therefore, no one can know the meaning of the sensation-word in another person's utterance.
- The meaning of the sensation-word is private.

**Example: pain**

\_\_\_ The word "pain" in "I am in pain" refers to the sensation I have and only I can have cognitive access to this sensation.

\_\_\_ This sensation of pain is the meaning of "pain" in my utterance.

\_\_\_ Since this sensation is private to me, the meaning of "pain" must also be private to me.

**[Wittgenstein's criticism]:**

1. Under Locke's theory, it is impossible to communicate about our pain.
2. But we do communicate about our pain.
3. Therefore, Locke's theory is wrong.

**Discussion Questions:**

*Q:* Is it really possible to communicate about pain? Whose pain are we talking about?

*Q:* Is it possible to verify someone else's statement: 'I am in pain'? What would the principle of verification be for others' statements? What would the principle of verification be for my own statement?

*Q:* What is the meaning of "pain" in "I am in pain"? Is it a general type of sensation or is it a unique sensation pertaining to me?

*Q:* Is a person's sincere report on inner sensations "incorrigible"? Under what conditions would the person be said to be wrong?

**[Wittgenstein's second argument]:**

1. Meaning is determined in the practices of rules following.
2. If a person uses the word 'red' in all observable ways as the other members of the linguistic community, then he knows the meaning of the word 'red' even if he has different qualitative sensations associated with the word.
3. Therefore, the private sensation has no relevance to the meaning of the word 'red.'

***Q:* How does a child learn to use the word 'hurt' to name her pain?**

\_\_\_ Wittgenstein: "Words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and later, sentences". It is in this way that sensations get their place in the language game.

**[Cook's examples]:**

\_\_\_ He has his father's build or he has his mother's eyes. ≠ He has his father's coat or his mother's hat.

\_\_\_ I could see a broken arm by my side after an accident and thought it was mine, when it was actually my neighbor's. ≠ I could feel a toothache and thought it was mine when it was actually my neighbor's.

\_\_\_ I've got Bright's disease and he has mine. ≠ I've got his hat and he has mine.

\_\_\_ His personality is quite pleasant, but are you sure it is his?

\_\_\_ His build is quite angular, but are you sure it is his?

- ❖ These statements are not to be analyzed literally, doing so would violate the language game. We are misled by the similarity of surface grammar to analyze these sentences as ordinary possessive claims.
- ❖ In the same way, "I feel my pain", "I cannot feel his pain" are mistaken sentences forbidden by the language game.
- ❖ We must reject the grammar which tries to force itself on us here. We have seen that the idea that sensations are private results from construing the grammar of sensation words on analogy with the grammar of words for physical objects. One consequence of this false grammatical analogy is that we are led to think that the names of sensations must get their meanings by private ostensive definitions.

### **Essay #1 topic:**

**What is the skeptic paradox? What is the point related to language? (read pp. 627-631)**