

**Phil/Ling 375: Meaning and Mind
[Handout #4]**

Saul Kripke: On Rules and Private Language

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View 1:

The understanding of meaning in natural languages can rest ultimately upon the knowledge that certain propositions are true.

**View 2:
(Wittgenstein's later view)**

The meaning of a proposition rests ultimately upon the use we make of it -- what we go on to do with it; and that its truth conditions are determined by its 'use' in this sense. → language-game theory

§ Private Language [I]

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

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

_____ The meaning of a word is identified with a private entity such as ideas or sensations. Ideas and sensations are "private"; therefore, meanings of words are private and not sharable.

[Privacy]:

An essential part of the inner/outer picture of the mind which has dominated modern philosophy is the idea that mental phenomena -- ideas, sense-data, representations, experiences, etc. -- are private in two respects:

- i. ***privately owned or inalienable***: no one else can have my pain; other people can at most have a pain that is similar to mine;
- ii. ***epistemically private***: only I can know that I am in pain, since only I feel it, others can only surmise that I am, on the basis of my behavior.

[Private language argument]:

_____ Such a language is not a personal code, nor a language which is used only in soliloquy, 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 unsharable and unteachable in principle, because its words refer to what can only be known to the speaker, namely his immediate private experiences.

§ Private Language [II]: Robinson Crusoe's Language

[Kripke's interpretation]

__ Wittgenstein's real argument against private language is not about sensation language, but something else: **"Hence it is not possible to obey a rule "privately": otherwise thinking one was obey a rule would be the same thing as obeying it."**

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

= [2] **Can a human language be spoken by only one person?**

(Could there be any language for an individual *considered in isolation*—whether or not he is physically isolated?)

[Wittgenstein's argument against this sense of private language]: (Kripke's interpretation)

1. Speaking a language requires following rules.
2. Following rules requires a method of determining when rules are followed or broken.
3. This method requires having a judge other than the speaker. (It does not make sense to say that someone is following a rule unless there is some way of judging whether the rule has been followed or broken. The speaker himself cannot be the final arbiter of this.)
4. Therefore, there has to be at least two people in order to have a language.
5. Therefore, there can be no language where there is only one speaker.

Discussion: If there was Robinson Crusoe, who was raised an English speaker, could he continue to say "There's a coconut" after he was stranded on the desert island? If there was a feral child who has never learned any human language, could she develop a "language" of her own?

[Language and communication]

[Wittgenstein's first argument against private language]: (Martinich's interpretation)

1. The sole purpose of language is to communicate with someone other than the self.
2. Crusoe would not be ordering or questioning or promising by means of any of his utterances, because there is no one to be ordered, questioned, or promised except himself.
3. Therefore, Crusoe would not be using a language.

[Wittgenstein's second argument against private language]: (Martinich's interpretation)

1. The function of language is communication.
2. To be able to communicate, people of the same linguistic community must have the same purpose (to communicate) and their usage must have some regularity.
3. The above is not possible when there is only one speaker in the community.
4. Therefore, there is no language when there is only one speaker in the community.

§ The Skeptic Paradox

__ The basic structure of Wittgenstein's approach can be presented as the skeptical paradox:

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made to accord with the rule. If everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here. (§201 *Philosophical Investigation*)

Q: What is the point of this paradox?

Suppose that I added $68 + 37$ and obtain the total '125'. The skeptic can ask me: how do you know for sure that you are using the addition function, and not something else?

'plus' = addition

'quus' = addition if $x, y < 57$; =5 if otherwise.

By hypothesis, I never explicitly told myself that I should say '125' in this very instance. Nor can I say that I should simply 'do the same thing I always did', if this means 'compute according to the rule exhibited by my previous examples.' That rule could just as well have been the rule for quaddition (the quus function) as for addition. The idea that in fact quaddition is what I meant, that in a sudden frenzy I have changed my previous usage, dramatizes the problem.

The Point: There is no fact, external or internal, by virtue of which I mean 'plus' and not 'quus'.

1. We must give up the attempt to find any fact about me in virtue of which I mean 'plus' rather than 'quus', and must then go on in a certain way.
2. Instead we must look at *the circumstances under which* these assertions are introduced into discourse, and their role and utility in our lives.

[Argument formulated]:

1. If we confine ourselves to looking at one person alone, his psychological states and his external behavior, for the content of the rule he is following, then we can only go as far as demanding that his behavior accord with his own past intentions.
2. No one else by looking at his mind *and behavior* alone can say something like, "he is wrong if he does not accord with his own past intentions", since there can be no facts about him in virtue of which he accords with his intentions or not.
3. Therefore, if we consider a single person in isolation, then our ordinary practice licenses him to apply the rule in the way it strikes him.

4. Therefore, if one person is considered in isolation, then there are no truth conditions or facts in virtue of which it can be the case that he accords with his past intentions or not.
5. Therefore, if one person is considered in isolation, the notion of a rule as guiding the person who adopts it can have no substantive content.

The point:

_____ As long as we regard him as following a rule “privately,” so that we pay attention to his justification conditions alone, all we can say is that he is not bound by *any* rule.

§ Wittgenstein's skeptical solution to this paradox

[Wittgenstein *PI* §202]:

_____ **“To think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately'; otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same things as obeying it.”**

* **Kripke:** What is being denied is what might be called the ‘private model’ of rule following, that the notion of a person following a given rule is to be analyzed simply in terms of facts about the rule follower and the rule follower alone, without reference to his membership in a wider community.

Causation makes no sense when applied to two isolated events, with the rest of the universe removed.

➔ Rule makes no sense when applied to isolated individuals, with everyone else removed.

* The skeptical solution does not allow us to speak of a single individual, considered by himself and in isolation, as *ever meaning anything*.

Discussion: Do you agree with the conclusion on the impossibility of private language (by one person)?

§ Conclusion

Language is a communal activity:

- (i) The individual may come up with a response that the community regards as incorrect because he is not following the rule;
- (ii) The community can also accept him as a rule follower, thus enabling him to engage in some types of interactions with them.
- (iii) If everyone agrees upon a certain answer or usage, then no one will feel justified in calling the answer or usage wrong.