**Phil 435: Philosophy of Language**
**[Handout 3]**

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**John Cook: Wittgenstein on Privacy**
**Kripke: Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language**

|  **View 1:** | **View 2:**<br>**(Wittgenstein's later view)** |
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| **The understanding of meaning in natural languages can rest ultimately upon the knowledge that certain propositions are true.** | **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** |

**What is a *private* language?**

**[Wittgenstein's Dictionary]:**

**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-date, representations, experiences, etc. -- are private in two respects:

>*privately owned* or *inalienable*: no one else can have my pin; other people can at most have a pain that is similar to mine;
>*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 unshared and unteachable in principle, because its words refer to what can only be known to the speaker, namely his immediate private experiences.

**\* This question can be analyzed in four ways. In what follows we will have four parts to discuss these four possible readings.**

**§ Part I.  Language and Ideas**

**Q: What does it mean to have a private language?**
**= Q1: 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.**

**[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?**

**[John Cook's refutation of the private language argument]:**
1. No one can have another person's shadow, but it is not true that no one can know anything about that person's shadow.
2. Therefore, the claim that no one can another person's pain does not lead to the claim that no one can know anything about that person's pain.

___ **Martinich: The issue of whether language is private or not does not hang on whether pains or sensations are private or not.  The nature of language can be misdescribed even if public objects are the objects of reference.**
___ **Q: Why?**

**[Wittgenstein's second argument]:**
1. Meaning is determined in the practices of rules following. (Wittgenstein's theory of a language game: fetch me a hammer,....  Do you know a game is determined by whether you know how to follow the rules of this game.)
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."

**[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 mislead 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.**

*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.

**We must reject the grammar which tries to force itself on us here. We have seen that the idea that sensations are private results form 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.**

**§ Wittgenstein's theory of language-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 my 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. *It is our acting which lies at the bottom of the language-game.*
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.**

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

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**§ Part II. Robinson Crusoe's Language**

**Q: What does it mean to have a private language?**
**= Q2: Can a human language be spoken by only one person?**
**(If all but one member of a linguistic community died, would the sole surviving member have a language?)**

**[Wittgenstein's argument]:**
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.
4. ___ Martinich: 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.

**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?**
___ Martinich: No.  Crusoe is merely vocalizing, making sounds using human vocal chords, sounds that are isomorphic or isophonic with English.  He is not really using genuine communicative instances of English.  He is like a voice synthesizer.

**[Martinich's first argument]:**
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.

**[Martinich's second argument]:**
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.

**[If you don't buy this argument, consider this possibility: after Crusoe has spent 30 years on the island, would he still be speaking English?]**

**[Kripke's interpretation]**

**"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."**

**§ The Skeptic Paradox**

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 important thing about this case is that, if we confine ourselves to looking at one person alone, his psychological states and his external behavior, this is as far as we can go.

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"'; the whole point of the skeptical argument was that there can be no facts about him in virtue of which he accords with his intentions or not. All we can say, if we consider a single person in isolation, is that our ordinary practice licenses him to apply the rule in the way it strikes him.

The answer is that, if one person is considered in isolation, the notion of a rule as guiding the person who adopts it can have no substantive content. There are, we have seen, no truth conditions or facts in virtue of which it can be the case that he accords with his past intentions or not. 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 licensed to follow the rule as it strikes him.

**\* 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.**

**§ Wittgenstein's sceptical solution to this paradox**

**1.** A sceptical solution of a sceptical philosophical problem begins on the contrary by **conceding that the skeptic's negative assertions are unanswerable**.
2. This means that 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. Instead we must consider how we actually use: (i) the categorical assertion that an individual is following a given rule; (ii) the conditional assertion that "if an individual follows such-and-such a rule, he must do so-and-so on a given occasion".
That is to say, we must look at the circumstances under which these assertions are introduced into discourse, and their role and utility in our lives.

**(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.**

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**§ Part III.   Language and Brain**

**Q: What does it mean to have a private language?**
**= Q3: Is there a language of thought?**

**[Chomsky's view]:**
___ Different peoples speak different languages, but they must share a universal grammar which is imbedded in our brain.
___ This grammar consists of rules which tell us which strings of words are sentences and what sentences mean. These rules are innate in us. We are born pre-programmed with information about the kinds of rules we will need to learn in learning a language. We have innate knowledge of "universal grammar". (This view clearly violates the Verification Principle.]
___ Linguistic is thus a branch of brain science.
___ The differences between different languages are not very great as they exist in the brains of different language speakers. Viewed by an angel, all human languages would look identical.

**Note:**
This view influenced linguists and artificial intelligence scientists to combine efforts in studying the basic structure of languages and to build computer model in order to explain how the brain works. Jerry Fodor introduced the notion *Mentalese* in his *The Language of Thought*. He thinks that Mentalese is as rich as our public language and that it is innate.
➔ the philosophy of mind

**\* It seems clear that our system of inner representation and our system of linguistic representations are importantly similar. In the light of this, it is tempting to suppose that our inner system is our public language; that our language of thought is our language of talk.**
___ our cognitive capacities seem closely correlated with our linguistic capacities.
___ our ability to think certain thoughts depends on language (e.g. we could not have beliefs about aircraft before we had the word for it.)
___ Not all thinking is in the public language. The pre-linguistic children think, but not in a public language. We can also think about music or chess, and this thinking is not in a linguistic form.
**Q: Does a pre-linguistic child think? What is his thinking like?**

**\* Note – The Language Instinct** (from Wikipedia)

*The Language Instinct* is a book by Steven Pinker, published in 1994. In it, Pinker argues that humans are born with an innate capacity for language. In addition, he deals sympathetically with Noam Chomsky's claim that all human language shows evidence of a universal grammar. In the final chapter Pinker dissents from the skepticism shown by Chomsky that evolution by natural selection is equal to the challenge of explaining a human language instinct.

**Thesis**
Pinker sets out to disabuse the reader of a number of common ideas about language, e.g. that children must be taught to use it, that most people's grammar is poor, that the quality of language is steadily declining, that language has a heavy influence on a person's possible range of thoughts, and that nonhuman animals have been taught language. Each of these claims, he argues, is false. Instead, Pinker sees language as an ability unique to humans, produced by evolution to solve the specific problem of communication among social hunter-gatherers. He compares language to other species' specialized adaptations such as spiders' web-weaving or beavers' dam-building behavior, calling all three "instincts."

By calling language an instinct, Pinker means that it is not a human invention in the sense that metalworking and even writing are. While only some human cultures possess these technologies, all cultures possess language itself. As further evidence for the universality of language, Pinker notes that children spontaneously invent a consistent grammatical speech even if they grow up among a mixed-culture population speaking an informal trade pidgin with no consistent rules. Deaf babies "babble" with their hands as others normally do with voice, and spontaneously invent sign languages with true grammar rather than a crude "me Tarzan, you Jane" pointing system. Language (speech) also develops in the absence of formal instruction or active attempts by parents to correct children's grammar. These signs suggest that rather than being a human invention, language is an innate human ability. Pinker also distinguishes language from humans' general reasoning ability, emphasizing that it is not simply a mark of advanced intelligence but rather a specialized "mental module."

Incidentally, he distinguishes the linguist's notion of grammar, such as the placement of adjectives, from formal rules such as those in The Elements of Style, saying that the latter are neither instinctive nor useful and exist mainly to sell style books. The fact that rules such as "don't end sentences with prepositions" must be explicitly taught shows how irrelevant they are to actual communication; therefore they should not be put up with. Pinker attempts to trace the outlines of the language instinct by citing his own studies of language acquisition in children, and the works of many other linguists and psychologists in multiple fields, as well as numerous examples from popular culture. He notes, for instance, that specific types of brain damage cause specific impairments of language such as Broca's aphasia or Wernicke's aphasia, that specific types of grammatical construction are especially hard to understand, and that there seems to be a critical period in childhood for language development just as there is a critical period for vision development in cats. Much of the book refers to Chomsky's concept of a universal grammar, a meta-grammar into which all human languages fit. Pinker explains that a universal grammar represents specific structures in the human brain that recognize the general rules of other humans' speech, such as whether the local language places adjectives before or after nouns, and begin a specialized and very rapid learning process not explainable as reasoning from first principles or pure logic. This learning machinery exists only during a specific critical period of childhood and is then disassembled for thrift, freeing resources in an energy-hungry brain.

**\* Against Wittgenstein's view:**
**\_\_\_ Language is not tied to communication since it is a component of the brain. Linguistic communication is merely one of several uses to which language can be put: it can also be used to remember things, to make private computations, and to write personal poetry.**

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**§ Part IV.  Individualistic Languages**

**Q: What does it mean to have a private language?**
**= Q4: Can there be a language with private meanings based on individuals' different understandings?**

**[Grice's theory of speaker meaning]:**
**\_\_\_ Grice offered explanations of the meaning of utterances in terms of the intentions of utterers.  Speaker meaning is prior to conventional meaning.**

**Q: Is there a circularity?**
\_\_\_ A: Speaker meanings create the conventional written and spoken forms of the language.  But it is because we have learned those conventions that we are able to have the rich variety of thoughts, and hence produce the rich variety of speaker meaning that we do.  The creation of a convention requires some people to have thoughts the contents of which are not fully dependent on conventions.  Once created each convention encourages other people to have new thoughts. Often the contents of many of those thoughts are to be explained partly in terms of that convention.  Thought contents explain the conventions that explain *other* thought contents.  There is no circle in the explanation.

**[Davidson's semantic holism]:**
\_\_\_ A speaker has a whole system of beliefs about meanings of words.  These metalinguistic beliefs affect their usage of these words.  Since we sometimes do not share same metalinguistic beliefs, we don't always use words in the same way.

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**Focus Questions for Essay #3: [Answer both – write about 1 ½ page for each author]**

   **(1) What is Austin's distinction of the constative and the performative utterances?  Why does he eventually see the breakdown of this distinction?**
   **(2) What is Searle's analysis of 'promising'?  Analyze whether the sincerity condition is "essential" to the definition of 'promise' (develop your own view here).**