10

Private Languages

For a decade after the dictation of the *Brown Book* in 1935 Wittgenstein worked simultaneously on his *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* and on the *Philosophical Investigations*. The first, and major, part of the latter work was complete by 1945. As we have seen, a considerable part of the material worked into the text came from passages in the *Bemerkungen* or *Grammatik*, or had close similarities with the notes dictated in the *Blue and Brown Books*. We have already observed the similarities with the earlier work of the passages on primitive language-games (PI, I, 1–26), on ostensive definition (PI, I, 28–37), on games, rules and family-likeness (PI, I, 65–88), on understanding (PI, I, 138–55, 179–97), on reading (PI, I, 156–78), on following a rule (PI, I, 198–242), on thought and speech (PI, I, 318–62), on expectation and fulfilment (PI, I, 439–65). The last thirty or so pages of part one of the *Investigations* (PI, I, 491–693) contain many paragraphs unchanged from the *Grammatik*. Wittgenstein's editors tell us that if he had lived to publish the work himself, he would have suppressed a good deal of what was in this section, and worked into its place material which he wrote in 1947–9, and which now appears as the second part of the *Investigations*. Of the more original material in *Investigations* I there are two sections which we shall consider in some detail. The first is the criticism of logical atomism and the revision of the *Tractatus* philosophy of logic (PI, I, 39–64 and 89–137 respectively), which will be considered in the final chapter. The second is the argument against a private language which, with kindred matters, occupies 243–363, and was first adumbrated in some lecture notes on private experience written in 1934–6 and published in 1968. The argument to prove the impossibility of a private language will be the topic of the present chapter.

What is a private language, we may wonder, and why does its possibility matter? A private language, in the sense discussed by Wittgenstein, is a

language whose words 'refer to what can only be known to the person speaking: to his immediate private sensations' (PI, I, 243). Whether such a language is possible has philosophical importance not so much as a question in its own right as because of its consequences for epistemology and philosophy of mind. As was mentioned in the first chapter, it is entailed by several traditional and influential philosophical theories that a private language is possible; consequently, if private languages are impossible those theories are false. For instance, some empiricist philosophers have thought that the only matters of fact we really know are our own experiences: what we claim to know about the world or about other people is based on our knowledge of our own mental states and processes. The same philosophers have commonly taken for granted that our knowledge of our experiences can be expressed in language, at least to ourselves, and that the possibility of this expression does not presuppose any acquaintance with the external world or other minds. Anyone who accepts this much must believe in the possibility of a private language whose words acquire meaning simply by being linked to private experiences. Indeed he must believe that our actual language is a private language, not in the sense that it is peculiar to a single user, but in the sense that its words have acquired their meaning for each of us by an essentially private process: an internal ostensive definition in which an appropriate sample of experience was attended to and associated with a word. Of course, if words are thought of as acquiring meaning in this way, a doubt may arise whether the samples from which one person has acquired his vocabulary are really like the samples from which another person has done so. Thus this form of empiricism carries with it a version of scepticism which finds expression in such thoughts as the following: 'For all we know, what I call "red" you call "green" and vice versa' (cf. BB 60; PI, I, 272). One point of the private-language argument is to refute this version of empiricism with its attendant scepticism; to show that the thought just expressed is a nonsensical one and that the doubts it conjures up are spurious. The programme of the private-language argument can be well summed up in a quotation from the *Tractatus*. 'Scepticism is *not* irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical, when it tries to raise doubts where no questions can be asked. For doubt only can exist where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists, and an answer only where something *can be said*' (TLP 6.51). The *Investigations* shows that the empiricist sceptic must use a private language in order to formulate his question; but in a private language nothing can be said and so no questions can be asked.

Wittgenstein considered that the notion of a private language rested on two fundamental mistakes, one about the nature of experience, and one

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about the nature of language. The mistake about experience was the belief that experience is private; the mistake about language was the belief that words can acquire meaning by bare ostensive definition. The mistake about language has already been considered: we have seen how Wittgenstein argued against the primacy of ostensive definition, against the idea that bare ostension without training in the use of words could constitute the teaching of a language. His arguments concern public ostensive definition as well as private ostensive definition: they apply to the naming of shapes and colours and men as well as to the naming of pains and moods. But if the arguments are accepted then the private-language theory is refuted before it is stated: at least if it supposes the meanings of names for sensations could be learnt simply by acquaintance with the names' bearers, i.e. simply by having and attending to the sensations. However, a defender of private languages might suggest the possibility of a language which was private in that its words *referred to* private sensations without necessarily being private in that its words were *learnt from* private sensations by bare ostension. A private language, he might maintain, might be learnt from private sensations not by bare ostension but by some private analogue of training in the use of words. This suggestion shows that the critique of the primacy of ostensive definition does not render superfluous the later explicit discussion of private languages. What that later discussion does, in effect, is to show that in the case of the private ostensive definition there *cannot* be any analogue of the background which is necessary if the public ostensive definition is to convey meaning.

After these prolegomena we may consider section 243 in which Wittgenstein introduces the private language. Could we, he asks,

> imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences – his feelings, moods and the rest – for his private use? – Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language? – But that is not what I mean. The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language. (PI, I, 243)

Having defined a private language as a language whose words refer to the speaker's immediate private sensations, Wittgenstein goes on to comment on the expressions occurring in this definition, and first of all on the expression 'refer to'. In section 244 he asks 'How do words *refer* to sensations?'

In this passage he appears to have no objection to calling 'pain' the name of a sensation, or to calling 'I am in pain' a proposition. 'We talk

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about sensations every day' he says 'and give them *names*' and, he asks, 'How does a human learn the meaning of the *names* of sensations?' As one possible answer to this question he suggests that words replace the natural preverbal expression of sensation. 'A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, *sentences*' (PI, I, 244; italics added).

Elsewhere, however, Wittgenstein has been taken to deny that a word such as 'pain' names a sensation. He says, for instance, 'If we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of "object and name" the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant' (PI, I, 293). This seems to suggest that we should not so construe the grammar, i.e. should not consider a sensation-word like 'pain' as the name of an object. In the *Zettel* Wittgenstein's wayward self says '"Joy" surely designates an inward thing' and his sterner self replies 'No. "Joy" designates nothing. Neither any inward nor any outward thing' (Z 487).

These passages can be reconciled in the light of the attack on the primacy of ostensive definition. The model of 'object and name' which we are to reject is the idea that a speaker understands a name by being acquainted with its bearer. This is clear from the context: at PI, I, 293 Wittgenstein is criticizing the theory that one knows what pain is only from one's own case. That theory is one formulation of the idea that it is acquaintance which conveys meaning: it is only one's own pain that one is acquainted with, so it is only from one's own case that one knows what pain is. If this were true, and each man knew what pain was only from his own case, then no one could teach anyone else the meaning of the word 'pain'; each speaker would have to name the sensation for himself by a private ostensive definition.

Wittgenstein considers this suggestion at PI, I, 257, and brings the critique of ostensive definition to bear.

> What does it mean to say that he has 'named his pain'? – How has he done this naming of pain? And whatever he did, what was its purpose? When one says 'He gave a name to his sensation' one forgets that a great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense. And when we speak of someone's having given a name to pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word 'pain'; it shows the post where the new word is stationed.

This echoes the remarks about public ostensive definition: 'The ostensive definition explains the use – the meaning – of the word when the overall role of the word in language is clear' (PI, I, 30). Wittgenstein is not denying that one can give a name to a sensation; he is merely affirming that giving

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a name presupposes stage-setting. Such stage-setting, he will go on to argue, is possible in a public language, but not a private language. Given the stage-setting, the word for a sensation may be ostensively defined no less than the name of a colour of a piece of furniture (BB 69; PI, I, 288).

To sum up: if by 'name' one means 'word whose meaning is learnt by bare ostensive definition', then 'pain' is not the name of a sensation; but if by 'name' one means what is ordinarily meant by that word, then of course 'pain' is the name of a sensation (cf. BB 82).

If the word 'pain' does not refer to a sensation by being attached to it by bare ostensive definition, how does it refer? In what way is it connected with the sensation? One possibility, Wittgenstein says, is that it is a learnt, articulate replacement of unlearnt, inarticulate expressions of sensation such as moans and winces (PI, I, 244; cf. PE 296, 301). The word 'pain' cannot, as it were, hook on to pain directly; it must be attached to pain through its connections with the natural expressions of pain (cf. PI, I, 256–7, 271). To try to connect 'pain' with pain in isolation from unlearnt pain-behaviour would be to try to insert language between pain and its expression. This, Wittgenstein thinks, is absurd: presumably because the verbal manifestation of pain is itself an expression of pain (PI, I, 245).

Few people are immediately convinced by Wittgenstein's suggestion that it is only via the expression of pain that the word 'pain' can mean pain. Surely, we want to say, we can have a pain without ever saying or showing that we do; and on the other hand we can say that we have a pain without really having one; the only connection between pain and the expression of pain is that they sometimes coincide. Pain and its expression seem no more essentially connected than redness and sweetness: sometimes what is red is sweet, and sometimes not.

In the face of this objection Wittgenstein immediately agrees that in our language we use the words 'being in pain' in such a way that we can say 'A is in pain but he does not show it.' But he insists that we should have no use for the expression if its application was severed from behavioural criteria. So the relation of pain to pain-behaviour is not the same as the relation of redness to sweetness. It is essential to the language-game with the word 'pain' that the people who play it both behave in the particular way we call expressing pain, and sometimes more or less entirely conceal their pains (cf. PE 286, 290; PI, I, 281, 304).

Thus Wittgenstein's position differs from behaviourism. If pain is identified with pain-behaviour, then 'A is in pain' means 'A is behaving in such-and-such a way.' But Wittgenstein rejects this interpretation of his theory that pain-language is connected with pain-behaviour. 'Pain' does

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not mean crying: the verbal expression of pain does not describe the natural expression of pain, but takes its place (PI, I, 244).

If pain and pain-behaviour are separable, how are our words for sensations 'tied up with' our natural expressions of sensations? One way suggested by Wittgenstein is that they are *learnt in connection with* the natural expression (PI, I, 244; PE 293, 295). Is this the only possible connection? If so, then an innate knowledge of the meaning of 'pain' would be inconceivable: if only learning connects word and sensation an unlearned connection would be impossible. I think that Wittgenstein did not mean to rule out the possibility of innate knowledge (BB 12, 96–7). But even innate knowledge of the meaning of 'pain' would have to connect with the natural expression of pain in a certain way. Knowledge of the meaning would have to be exercised in use of the word, and the use of the word would have to fit in with the usual symptoms and circumstances of pain – with symptoms such as wincing and circumstances such as injury (cf. PI, I, 270). Knowledge of the meaning of 'pain', whether inborn, or conferred by a drug, or a sudden gift of the gods, must always be capable of investigation by such criteria. If some humanoid creatures used a word which had no such connection with the symptoms and circumstances of pain, it would be difficult to see why the word should be translated as 'pain'.

The private language was to consist of words 'to refer to private sensations'. Having discussed in sections 244–5 the expression 'refer to', Wittgenstein turns in 246–55 to the word 'private'. He asks: 'To what extent are my sensations private?', and he distinguishes two senses of the word 'private'. The first sense of privacy has to do with knowledge and the second sense has to do with possession: in the first sense, something is private to me if only I can know about it, and in the second sense something is private to me if only I can have it. To claim that pains are private in the first sense is to say 'Only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it' (PI, I, 246); to claim that pains are private in the second sense is to say 'Another person can't have my pains' (PI, I, 253). Using words that are not used by Wittgenstein, we may use for the first sense of 'private' the abbreviation 'incommunicable' and for the second sense of 'private' the abbreviation 'inalienable'. The question 'Are sensations private?' breaks up into two questions: (i) 'Are sensations incommunicable?' (ii) 'Are sensations inalienable?' Crudely, Wittgenstein's answer to (i) is 'No' and to (ii) is 'Not in any way peculiar to sensations.'

The thesis that pains are incommunicable is a conjunction of two separable theses: (i) I can know that I am in pain; (ii) other people cannot

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know that I am in pain. Wittgenstein rejects both theses. Let us consider the second first (PI, I, 246ff.). 'In one way' he says 'this is false, and in another nonsense.' If we take the word 'know' as it is normally used, then the claim is false: other people often know when I am in pain: for instance, if they see me falling into flames and crying out (PE 318). On the other hand, if we take the word 'know' to mean 'know in such a way that doubt is logically excluded' then the thesis is senseless, for there can be knowledge only where doubt is possible (cf. PI, II, 221).

One reason why people believe that one man can never know if another man is in pain is the possibility of pretence: may not a man who appears to be in pain be merely pretending? To this Wittgenstein replies that there are cases in which the supposition of pretence is senseless: for instance, the case of infants (PI, I, 249) and animals (PI, I, 250). In order to be able to pretend or to lie one needs to master certain skills which infants and animals lack (cf. also PI, II, 227–9).

Sometimes people claim that one man can never really know of another's pain because they fail to distinguish between inalienability and incommunicability. They assume that to know pain is to have pain, and because they believe that one person cannot have another's pain, they conclude that one person cannot know another's pain. But the impossibility they have in mind is not a mere matter-of-fact impossibility: they mean that it makes no sense to say that A knows B's pain. If so, Wittgenstein replies, then it makes no sense to say that A *doesn't* know B's pain: the negation of a senseless sentence is itself senseless. 'You did not state that knowing was a goal which you could not reach, and that you have to be content with conjecturing; rather there is no goal in this game.' The statement 'You can't know when A has pain' is analogous to a statement like 'There is no goal in an endurance race' (BB 54).

Wittgenstein rejects also the second part of the incommunicability thesis: 'I can know when I am in pain.' It can't, he says, be said of me at all that I know I am in pain, except perhaps as a joke; other people cannot be said to learn of my sensations *only* from my behaviour, because this suggests that I learn of them. But I cannot be said to learn of them: I *have* them (PI, I, 246).

Many people are disconcerted by this remark of Wittgenstein's. It is true, they say, that there is no such thing as *learning* that one is in pain, but that only shows that there are some things we know without having learnt them. If I cannot know of my own sensations, how can I know of anything else? One cannot doubt that one is in pain (as Wittgenstein himself agrees (PI, I, 288)), and surely one knows what one cannot doubt! Wittgenstein may be right when he says that doubt here is not just

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impossible, but actually senseless: but isn't that so much the better? If doubt is not merely psychologically, but logically, impossible, then the corresponding knowledge must be so much more secure.

To a first approximation, Wittgenstein's answer runs as follows. 'I know when I am in pain' can be taken in two ways: as an empirical proposition or as a grammatical one. As a grammatical proposition (a proposition to explain the meaning of a word) it means: it is senseless to say 'I doubt whether I am in pain.' So taken, the proposition is correct (PI, I, 247). But those who argue that because we cannot doubt our sensations we must know of them are misled by the form of the proposition into taking it as an empirical proposition (PI, I, 251). Where it is senseless to say 'I doubt whether . . .' it is not always true to say 'I know that . . .' This can be seen if we complete the expressions not with 'I am in pain' but with 'Good morning!' or 'Shut the door.' 'I doubt whether good morning' and 'I know that good morning' are equally senseless, as are 'I doubt whether shut the door' and 'I know that shut the door.' Of course, 'I am in pain', unlike the other two completions, has the form of a declarative sentence; but Wittgenstein may fairly insist that this is insufficient to show that it *is* a declarative sentence. The words 'I am in pain' may look like a description of a mental state; but they may in fact be more like a cry of complaint (cf. PI, II, 189). If they are, then 'I doubt whether I am in pain' may be senseless in the same way as 'I doubt whether ouch.' If so, then it is clearly out of place to talk of knowledge and certainty. It would be foolish to say 'Since it is not just psychologically but logically impossible to doubt whether good morning, the knowledge that good morning must be so much the more secure.'

Whether Wittgenstein is right about 'I know I am in pain' depends therefore on whether 'I am in pain' is, as it appears to be, a declarative sentence, a description of a mental state. This question will have to be pursued later: it can be waived for the moment since the rejection of 'When I am in pain I know that I am in pain' does not function as a premiss in the argument against private language.

In section 253 Wittgenstein passes from the incommunicability thesis to the claim that pains are inalienable: 'Only I can have my pains.' Is this claim true? 'If they are *my* pains then *I* have them' is a straightforwardly grammatical statement, drawing attention to the connection between the pronoun 'I' and the possessive 'my'; but it tells us nothing particular about pain, since the sentence remains correct no matter what plural noun is substituted for 'pains'. But two questions arise: (i) What is *having* here? and (ii) Granted that if they are my pains I must have them, can anyone

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else have them in addition to me? (Compare: 'Since it is my bank account, I have it, but my wife shares it too.')

'Which are *my* pains? What counts as a criterion of identity here?' asks Wittgenstein (PI, I, 253). The two questions are distinct. One asks for the criterion for the possessor of a pain, the other for the criterion of identity for a pain. The first question is answered in section 302: the possessor of pain is the person who gives it expression. *My* pains, then, are the pains which I express; or perhaps the pains which, if expressed at all, would be expressed by me.

This may seem a strange criterion. Surely my pains are the pains *felt in my body*? Against this Wittgenstein argued repeatedly that one could quite conceivably feel pain in someone else's body (cf. WWK 49; PB 90ff.; BB 49–55).

> In order to see that it is conceivable that one person should have pain in another person's body, one must examine what sort of facts we call criteria for a pain being in a certain place... Suppose I feel a pain which on the evidence of the pain alone, e.g. with closed eyes, I should call a pain in my left hand. Someone asks me to touch the painful spot with my right hand. I do so and looking round perceive that I am touching my neighbour's hand. (BB 49)

This would be pain *felt in* another's body, and not just pain *caused by injury* to another's body (which would also be conceivable – e.g. if I feel pain in my finger whenever you cut yours; cf. BB 54). So my pain is not necessarily pain felt in my body. My pains are the pains to which I give expression; and the expression of my pain (e.g. pointing to places, treating them with solicitude) may single out a place outside my own body.

Now what of the criterion of identity for pains? How, Wittgenstein asks, are pains such as toothache distinguished from each other (PB 91)? By intensity, and similar characteristics, and location. Suppose that these are the same – suppose that you and I both feel a sharp pain in the upper abdomen one hour after eating the same food – then it is perfectly natural to say that we both feel the same pain. But, it might be thought, this is not strictly correct, since the pains are not felt literally in the same place, but only in corresponding places in two different bodies. Well, Wittgenstein points out, two Siamese twins might feel pain in exactly the same place, namely, the place where they are joined together. Even so, it might be said, the pains are only specifically the same, but numerically distinct; because one pain is Tweedledum's pain and the other is Tweedledee's pain. But this, Wittgenstein says, is to make the possessor a characteristic of the pain

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itself; in the terminology I used above, it is to make the identity of the possessor part of the criterion of identity for the pain: if there are two possessors then there are two pains. This makes '*Only* I can have my pains' a grammatical statement like 'If they are my pains' a have them.' It also makes it comparatively uninformative about pain. 'Only I can have my *x*' is true, not indeed of bank accounts, but of many things besides sensations: for instance, blushes and sneezes. If you blush, then that is your blush and nobody else's; and if you sneeze that is not my sneeze or the President's sneeze. But there is nothing specially occult about blushes and sneezes; their inalienability is a very tenuous sort of privacy. We may allow, then, that pains are inalienable; but this will not make sensations any more private than behaviour.

There is, of course, *one* sense in which experiences are more private than behaviour: experiences such as pain *can be* kept secret without being publicly manifested in any way. If one wants to call an experience thus kept to oneself 'private' – e.g. a chess move considered, and discarded, in the imagination – then there clearly are such private experiences, as Wittgenstein expressly admits (PE 292). But if a private experience is one that is kept secret, there is no reason to call an experience that is *not* kept secret a private experience. If a man itches, but does not scratch or report his itch, we may call that a private experience; but if he itches and does scratch, why should we call the itch private? If we take 'private' in this sense, and ask 'Are pains private experiences?' the only possible answer is 'Some are, and some are not.' And from the fact that some experiences are, in this sense, private experiences, it does not follow that all experiences could be private experiences. 'What sometimes happens could always happen' is a fallacy. Some money is forged; but it could not be the case that all money was forged (PI, I, 345; PE 314).

In the *Investigations*, then, from 246 to 252 Wittgenstein has argued that pain is not incommunicable; from 253 to 255 he has argued that pain has no special inalienability. At 256 he restates the private-language hypothesis. From what has been said up to this point it follows that *our* word 'pain' does not belong to a private language: from 258 onwards Wittgenstein is going to consider not pain, but pseudo-pain, i.e. a sensation supposed to be like pain but different from pain in being incommunicable. The name of pseudo-pain must be learnt by private ostensive definition. It would be cheating to call this process 'the naming of pain', Wittgenstein argues in 257, since naming is part of a language-game (and the private ceremony is not) and since the language-game with pain presupposes the outward signs of pain (whereas pseudo-pain has no outward expression). In 257 Wittgenstein argues that it is futile to start

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from pain and attempt to subtract its natural expression; in 258 he discusses the attempt to start from pseudo-pain and add to it a linguistic correlate. This section is the kernel of the private-language argument.

We are to suppose that I want to keep a diary about the occurrence of a certain sensation, and that I associate the sensation with the sign 'S'. It is essential to the supposition that no definition of the sign can be expressed: that is to say, that no definition can be given in terms of our public language. If this condition was not fulfilled, then the language to which the sign belonged would not be a private one. The sign must be defined for me alone, and this must be by a private ostensive definition, by my attending to the sensation and producing the sign.

> I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation . . . in this way I impress on myself the connection between the sign and the sensation.

Wittgenstein argues that no such ceremony could establish an appropriate connection.

> 'I impress it on myself' can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection right in future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'. (PI, I, 258)

This crucial passage is often misinterpreted. What would it be to remember the connection right? Many philosophers have taken 'I remember the connection right' to mean 'I use "S" when and only when I really have S.' They then take Wittgenstein's argument to be based on scepticism about memory: how can you be sure that you have remembered aright when next you call a sensation 'S'? In support of this interpretation they may quote Wittgenstein's advice 'Always get rid of the private object in this way: assume that it constantly changes, but that you do not notice the change because your memory constantly deceives you' (PI, II, 207).

Critics of Wittgenstein have found the argument, so interpreted, quite unconvincing. Surely, they say, the untrustworthiness of memory presents no more and no less a problem for the user of a private language than for the user of a public one. No, Wittgenstein's defenders have said, for memory-mistakes about public objects may be corrected, memory-mistakes about private sensations cannot; and where correction is impossible, talk of correctness is out of place. At this point critics of Wittgenstein have

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either denied that truth demands corrigibility, or have sought to show that checking is possible in the private case too.

Both criticism and defence rest on a misunderstanding of the argument. Wittgenstein is not arguing 'When next I call something "S" how will I know it really is S?' He is arguing 'When next I call something "S" how will I know what I mean by "S"?' Even to think *falsely* that something is S I must know the meaning of 'S'; and this is what Wittgenstein argues is impossible in the private language.

> Let us imagine a table (something like a dictionary) that exists only in our imagination. A dictionary can be used to justify the translation of a word X into a word Y. But are we also to call it a justification if such a table is to be looked up only in the imagination? 'Well, yes; then it is a subjective justification.' – But justification consists in appealing to something independent. – 'But surely I can appeal from one memory to another. For example, I don't know if I have remembered the time of departure of a train right and to check it I call to mind how a page of the timetable looked. Isn't it the same here?' – No; for this process has got to produce the right memory. If the mental image of the timetable could not itself be tested for correctness, how could it confirm the correctness of the first memory? (As if someone were to buy several copies of the morning paper to assure himself that what it said was true.) (PI, I, 265)

This passage has puzzled commentators, but what it means is this. We are supposing that I wish to justify my calling a private sensation 'S' by appealing to a mental table in which memory-samples of private objects of various kinds are listed in correlation with symbols (Z 546–8, 552). To make use of such a table one must call up the right memory-sample: e.g. I must make sure to call up the memory-sample that belongs alongside 'S' and not the one which belongs to 'T'. But as this table exists only in the imagination, there can be no real looking up to see which sample goes with 'S'. All there can be is *remembering* which sample goes with 'S', i.e. remembering what 'S' means. But this is precisely what the table was supposed to confirm. In other words, the memory of the meaning of 'S' is being used to confirm itself. Once we realize this, we can see the point of the comparison with the newspaper. Since the process involves making use twice over of a single memory – the memory of which sample corresponds to 'S' – it is fairly compared to purchasing two copies of the same newspaper, and not just, say, to purchasing two different newspapers owned by the same untrustworthy magnate.

'Remembering the connection between sign and sensation', then, does not mean always identifying the sensation correctly, but simply remem-

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bering which sensation the sign means. This is, of course, what should have been expected: attaching meaning to a name does not mean acquiring infallibility in its use – knowing what 'woman' means does not guarantee that one will never mistake a woman for a man.

With this established, we may return to the key section 258. Wittgenstein wishes to show that the private ostensive definition 'This is called "S"' cannot confer meaning on 'S'. Suppose that at some time after making the would-be definition, the private-language speaker says of a later sensation 'This is S again.' We may ask him 'What do you mean by "S"?' Three types of answer are open to him: he may say 'I mean *this*'; he may appeal to a private memory-sample of S; he may mention a public correlate of S. All three types of reply are countered by Wittgenstein.

If the private-language speaker says 'By "S" I mean *this*', gesturing, as it were, to his current sensation, then it is clear that 'This is S' is not a genuine proposition capable of being true or false; for what gives it its content is the very same thing as gives it its truth: the significance of the predicate is supposed to be settled by the reference of the subject. 'Whatever is going to seem right to me is right' therefore, and 'That only means that here we can't talk about "right"' (PI, I, 258; cf. PI, II, 207; WWK 97).

Suppose next that the private-language speaker says 'By "S" I mean the sensation I named "S" in the past.' Since he no longer has the past sensation he must rely on memory: he must call up a memory-sample of S and compare it with his current sensation to see if the two are alike. But of course he must call up the *right* memory. Now is it possible that the wrong memory might come at this call? If not, then 'S' means whatever memory occurs to him in connection with 'S', and again whatever seems right is right. If so, then he does not really know what he means. It is no use his saying 'Well, at least I *believe* that this is the sensation "S" again', for he cannot even believe that without knowing what 'S' means (PI, I, 260). This appeal to memory-samples, as we have seen, is considered by Wittgenstein in section 265; and it is this memory-sample which is the private object of which Wittgenstein says 'Assume that it constantly changes, but that you do not notice the change' (PI, II, 207; cf. 1, 271).

The third possibility is that the private-language speaker correlates his use of 'S' with a public phenomenon.

> Let us now imagine a use for the entry of the sign 'S' in my diary. I discover that whenever I have a particular sensation a manometer shows that my blood-pressure rises. So I shall be able to say that my blood-pressure is rising without using any apparatus. This is a useful result. And now it seems quite indifferent whether I have recognized the sensation *right*

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> or not. Let us suppose I regularly identify it wrong, it does not matter in the least. And that alone shows that the hypothesis that I make a mistake is mere show. (PI, I, 270)

Here 'S' has a genuine use, but not as a part of a private language: it is tantamount to 'sensation which means my blood pressure is rising'. Why does Wittgenstein say no mistake is possible? Cannot I say 'S' and then find my blood pressure is *not* rising? Yes, but that is not what Wittgenstein is rejecting: he is talking about a would-be intermediate step between having the sensation and judging 'Now my blood pressure is rising', a step which would consist in recognizing the sensation as a sensation of a particular kind, and remembering that a sensation of that kind indicated a rise in blood-pressure. Misidentification here would not matter, provided that I both misidentified the kind of sensation *and* misremembered what kind of sensation indicated the blood-pressure rise. It is this, according to Wittgenstein, which shows that the hypothesis of a mistake is mere show. Suppose that I say 'S' and the blood-pressure does not rise: what reasons have I to say that I have misidentified the sensation rather than misremembered which kind of sensation goes with the rise? None at all, unless 'identifying the sensation' means 'identifying it as the blood-pressure-rising sensation'; but if it does then there is no room for the intermediate step, and 'S' is not the name of a private object but a word in a public language.

As we have seen, a crucial part is played in the private- language argument by Wittgenstein's advice 'Always get rid of the idea of the private object in this way: assume that it constantly changes, but that you do not notice the change because your memory constantly deceives you.' This advice has a verificationist ring, and some philosophers have thought that the private-language argument depends, in the last analysis, on verificationist premisses. But Wittgenstein's advice is not meant to be followed by the question 'How would you ever find out?' but by the question 'What possible difference would it make?' The private-language argument does indeed depend on premisses carried forward from Wittgenstein's earlier philosophy; but they are not peculiar to the verificationist period of the 1930s but date back to the time of the picture theory of the proposition in the 1910s.

As we have seen, Wittgenstein's earliest 'Notes on Logic' stress the bipolarity of the proposition, and insist that every proposition must be capable of both truth and falsehood (NB 94). For a proposition to be capable of being true it must also be capable of being false (NB 55). Every proposition was only a proposition in virtue of being articulated; a

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simple, non-articulated sign was incapable of being either true or false (NB 8). After their classic exposition in the *Tractatus* these ideas remained influential in the 1930s (cf. WWK 67, 88, 97).

It is clear that 'This is S' does not satisfy the conditions for propositionhood laid down in the 1910s. It is not articulate, since 'this' and 'S' are not given their meaning independently. It has no true–false poles, since what is supposed to give it its content is the same as what is supposed to give it its truth. In an early notebook Wittgenstein wrote 'Proposition and situation are related to one another like the yardstick and the length to be measured' (NB 32). 'This is S' is related to the sensation which it purports to identify like a yard-stick which grows or shrinks to the length of the object to be measured. 'Imagine' Wittgenstein says 'someone saying "But I know how tall I am" and laying his hand on top of his head to prove it' (PI, I, 279; cf. Z 536). A measure must be independent of what is measured; as we have seen, there is no way of giving 'S' genuine independence of the object it purports to name short of taking it into a public language.

It is time to return from 'This is S' to 'I'm in pain.' It cannot be said of 'I'm in pain' as it could of 'This is S' that what gives it its content gives it its truth; for 'I'm in pain' may be a lie, and therefore meaningful but false. ('This is S', of course, being in a language which only the speaker could understand, could not be a lie.) So 'I'm in pain' has true–false poles, and passes that test for being a proposition. Why then does Wittgenstein appear to reject the idea that 'I'm in pain' is a declarative sentence, a description of a conscious state? (cf. PI, I, 290f, 294; II, 189).

One might seek to give an account of the essence of description in the following manner: to describe a state of affairs is to read off certain features from the facts and portray them in words according to rules (PI, I, 292). Such a description of a state of affairs would be a picture of a fact in the sense of the *Tractatus*: to see whether such a picture is true or false I compare it with what it depicts. 'His eye is black' is a picture in this sense: it is compared with the real eye to see whether it is correct. Now 'He is in pain' – let us leave aside 'I am in pain' for the moment – is not a picture in this sense. It can be compared with reality, and checked for truth and falsehood, certainly; but what it gets compared with is not his pain, but the criteria of his pain, e.g. what he says and does.

> The sense in which an image is an image is determined by the way in which it is compared with reality. This we might call the method of projection. Now think of comparing an image of A's toothache with his toothache. How would you compare them? If you say, you compare them 'indirectly' via his

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> bodily behaviour, I answer that this means you *don't* compare them as you compare the picture of his behaviour with his behaviour. (BB 36)

In the *Investigations* and the *Zettel* Wittgenstein repeats that in the language-game with 'pain' there is no comparing of pain with its picture. We are tempted, he says, to say that it is not merely the picture of pain-behaviour which enters into the game, but also the picture of the pain (PI, I, 300). That is, we feel that in order to use 'He is in pain' we need not only a sample of pain-behaviour as a paradigm for comparison with his behaviour, but also a sample of *pain* for comparison with his pain. This sample, of course, need not, we think, be a real pain, but only an imagined pain, a mental proxy for pain. But surely real pain will be at least as good a sample as shadow-pain (BB 4); so in the *Zettel* Wittgenstein imagines someone saying 'I am not certain whether he is in pain' and pricking himself with a pin while saying it, so as to have the meaning of pain vividly before him so that he knows *what* he is in doubt of about the other man. 'So he has real pain; and now he knows what he is to doubt in someone else's case. He has the object before him and it is *not* some piece of behaviour or the like' (Z 546–8).

Of course this would not guarantee the sense of his statement, if it needed guaranteeing: what he needs is not pain but the *concept* of pain, the mastery of the use of 'pain'. 'It is a misunderstanding' Wittgenstein continues (PI, I, 300) 'to say "the picture of pain enters into the language-game with the word 'pain'."' The image of pain is not a picture and this image is not replaceable in the language-game by anything we should call a picture.' When I imagine someone in pain, my image is not something which is compared with his pain, but something which is compared with his behaviour; it is not replaceable by a picture of pain, because there is no method of projection to enable pain to be pictured (cf. PI, I, 301). If I were to construct a table linking pictures with words, in order to help me learn the meaning of 'pain', the table would not contain pictures of pain, (or even my own pain itself, as a model or paradigm: PI, I, 302) linked with 'pain': the pictures would have to be pictures of pain-behaviour (cf. PI, I, 265; Z 552).

This is summed up in a cryptic metaphor. 'If water boils in a pot, steam comes out of the pot and also pictured steam comes out of the pictured pot. But what if one insisted on saying that there must also be something boiling in the pictured pot?' (PI, I, 297). What Wittgenstein is here denying is not that *sensations* enter into the language-game with 'pain', but that *pictures of sensations* do. In the metaphor, the water is the pain, the steam is the pain-behaviour, the pot is the sufferer's body. In the language-game

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with pain (the *picture* of the water boiling in the pot) there are pictures only of the sufferer and his behaviour, not of his pain.

It is now time to move back again from 'He is in pain' to 'I am in pain.' We have seen that 'X is in pain' is not a picture of what it says, since when it is assessed for truth–falsity it is compared not with X's pain but with X's behaviour. Considered, then, as an instance of 'X is in pain', 'I am in pain' will get compared not with my pain, but with my behaviour, that is, with the part of my behaviour concerned with the expression of pain, with the *criteria* for pain. But my utterance of 'I am in pain' is itself an expression of pain. Consequently, if it is to be a description of my state, it is a description of a special kind: for it is a description which is to be compared with – *inter alia* – itself; and this is a unique type of comparison.

This insight was expressed by Wittgenstein in ways which *prima facie* conflict with each other. In the lectures recorded by Moore he denied that 'I have toothache' was a value of the propositional function 'X has toothache' (ML 307). In the *Investigations* he denied that when I say with truth 'I am in pain' I am identifying my sensation as pain and then describing it. I do not identify my sensation by criteria, but simply make use of the expression I have learnt. That is not the end of the language-game, but the beginning: we must beware of thinking that the beginning of the language-game is the sensation, which I then go on to describe (PI, I, 290).

This does not mean that 'I am in pain' is *not* a description. Wittgenstein goes on 'Perhaps the word "describe" tricks us here': there is a great difference between the language-game of describing a room and the language-game of describing a conscious state. It is *correct* to call 'I am in pain' a description: but the use of 'description' differs from that in 'description of my room'. It differs because my description of my room is not a criterion for what my room is like, whereas my description of my conscious state is a criterion for what it is like. The language-game of describing the room begins with observation of the room (PE 330); the language-game of describing sensations begins with criteria for sensations. Hence 'I am in pain' is not the end of a language-game, but a beginning (cf. PI, I, 291, 363).

Just as Wittgenstein thought that 'pain' was in one sense a name and in another not, so he can regard 'I am in pain' as in one sense a description and in another not. He can admit that, when a doctor on a ward-round asks a patient how he feels, it is perfectly natural to call the reply 'I am in pain' a description of the patient's state (cf. PI, II, 188). But he will deny that 'I am in pain' is a description of a state if that means that it is something read off from an internal state of affairs. To treat the expression

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of pain in this way as a description of pain is to make it seem too distant from pain. To adapt a metaphor of Wittgenstein's from another context, it is 'as when travelling in a car and feeling in a hurry I instinctively push against something in front of me as though I could push the car from inside'. Or it is as if 'I constructed a clock with all its wheels etc. and in the end fastened the dial to the pointer and made it go round with it' (BB 71). A description must be independent of what it is to be compared with if it is to be assessed as a correct or incorrect description: just as in order to tell the time the hands of a clock must be unfastened to the dial. 'I'm in pain', since it is an utterance which is a criterion for my conscious state, is not independent of it, and so cannot be a description of it in the same way as 'There is a chair in the corner' may be a description of my room (cf. PE 320).

Clearly this point has nothing to do with verificationism. The trouble with a clock whose hands are attached to the dial is not that we can never know whether it is telling the right time, but that it is not telling the time at all. Moreover the point has nothing to do with the nature of the speech-act which 'I'm in pain' may be used to perform. 'We surely do not always say that someone is *complaining* because he says he is in pain. So the words "I am in pain" may be a cry of complaint, and may be something else' (PI, II 189). They might, for instance, be uttered in order to give information to a doctor. But this would not make them in the full sense a description; for the doctor might acquire the same information from a wordless cry. A cry, which cannot be called a description, for all that may perform the same service as a description of one's inner life (PI, II, 189; PE 319).

Just as 'I'm in pain' is only a description in a special sense, so it is only true or false in a special sense (cf. PE 293), for its truth coincides with its truthfulness. One might adapt to the case of the avowal of pain what Wittgenstein says about the confession of a past thought (PI, II, 222). The criteria for the truth of the avowal that I am in pain are not the criteria for the true description of a process. The importance of the true avowal does not lie in its being a correct and certain report of a process. It resides rather in the special conclusions which can be drawn from an avowal whose truth is guaranteed by the special criteria of truthfulness. In this case there is no comparison of a proposition to reality (PE 294; cf. 295, 301).

We can now see why Wittgenstein rejected the idea that when I am in pain I know that I am in pain. Throughout his life he thought of knowledge as involving the possession of a true description of a state of affairs. That was why in the *Tractatus* he declared knowledge of tautologies impossible, since tautologies were not pictures of states of affairs

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(TLP 4.462, 5.51362; cf. 5.542). That is why, since 'I am in pain' is not, when I am in pain, a true description in the normal sense, 'I know that I am in pain' cannot be in order if 'know' is being used in the normal sense. Since the truth of 'I am in pain' coincides with its truthfulness, and there is no such thing as making a mistake here, Wittgenstein does not want to call it an assertion, or the expression of a piece of knowledge.

But Wittgenstein's position has nuances. Altogether in his writings Wittgenstein recognized the following senses or would-be senses of 'I know I'm in pain':

(1) Non-philosophical, empirical use (to rule out unconscious pain, if we have fixed experiential criteria for the case in which a man has pain but does not know it) (BB 55).
(2) Non-philosophical, non-empirical use: e.g. 'I know I'm in pain' as a joke; in these cases 'I'm in pain', with some nuance, is substitutable (PI, I, 246).
(3) Correct philosophical use: 'When I'm in pain I know I'm in pain' means: the expression of doubt is senseless (PI, I, 246).
(4) Philosophers' nonsense: doubt is both logically possible (to make its expression sensible) and logically impossible (I can't *a priori* be wrong about pain) (PI, II, 221; BB 30–55).

The philosophers' nonsense is once again a sin against the *Tractatus* principle that a proposition must be independent of what it records, as a measure must be independent of what it measures. Against this background, the philosophers' nonsense can be seen as treating expressions of mental states as if they were measurements of mental states (and therefore independent) of an infallible kind (the infallibility being secured at the price of non-independence). From this point of view, the epistemologists' complaint 'If I can't know my own sensations, how can I know anything?' appears like the lament 'If I can't place a winning bet after the race has been won, how can I ever place a winning bet at all?'

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