

**Philosophy 308**  
***The Language Revolution***  
**Russell Marcus**  
**Fall 2014**

Class #18 - The Private Language Argument  
Wittgenstein and Kripke

# Where We Are: Meaning

- Frege took meanings (propositions, concepts) to be objective, third-realm entities.
- The logical empiricists, preferring parsimony, thought of meaning as method of verification.
  - Methodologically behavioristic
  - Reductive, atomistic
- Quine argues that meaning is the property of larger swaths of language.
  - Still methodologically behavioristic
  - But: holism and the web of belief
  - Meaningfulness without meanings
- Wittgenstein can be interpreted as denying even the doctrine of meaningfulness.
  - Meanings skepticism

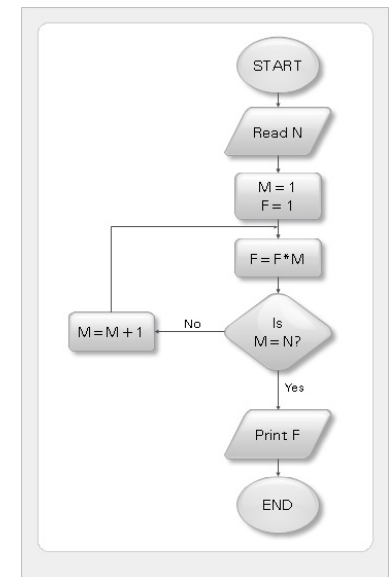
# Locke and Augustine on Communication

- Locke argued that our words must refer to our sensations.
- Otherwise, we would not know what we are communicating.
- 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.
- Frege's claim that sense determines reference is an heir.
- Wittgenstein's private language argument (PLA) is a response.



# What is the PLA?

- *Philosophical Investigations*.
  - Traditional interpretations locate the argument between §243 and §315 or so, with some further remarks later on.
  - Saul Kripke, in his 1982 *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, locates the argument significantly earlier in the text.
- On the traditional interpretation, the argument centrally concerns the nature of mental states.
- On Kripke's interpretation, the argument centrally concerns the nature of rules and rule-following.
- Kripke sees the discussion of mental states as an example of a more general claim.
- Today, we look at the traditional version.
- Tuesday, we look at Kripkenstein.



# Nick and Hal on the PLA

# 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).

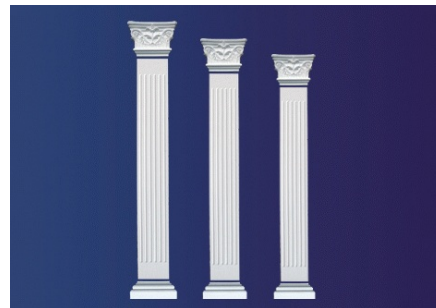
# Starting with Language

- Wittgenstein says that sensations are neither a something nor a nothing.
  - pain
  - your impression of a color, or an odor or taste
- Locke started his analysis of language with the presumption of the existence of sensations.
  - Direct awareness
- We construct a language which refers to them.
  - Empiricism: sensations are the basis on which all of our knowledge is built.
  - Even Quine argued that the boundary conditions on our theory construction are our sense experiences.
- Wittgenstein works in the other direction.
  - Starting with language
  - Working backwards to its grounds
  - We begin to doubt the sensations which Locke and all the rest took for granted.

# Meaning and Use

## *Investigations §1-§7*

- While 'apple' works the way Augustine and Locke say it does, 'five' and 'red' seem different.
  - ▶ They do not represent objects.
  - ▶ They provide instructions for action.
  - ▶ We might, as Plato did, reify redness or the number five.
  - ▶ Nevertheless, the uses of those terms are different from the uses of 'apple'.
- When we use a word, we follow conventional guidelines.
  - ▶ The grocer compares the term 'red' with a patch of red, and counts.
  - ▶ Such terms require instructions for how to use them.





# Same Objects, Different Labels

- The same object, under different instructions, may have a different label.
- Consider the way a child's stick can be a rocket, or a sword, or a pony.
- Or, consider the old Saturday Night Live skit: Shimmer.
- §6: A brake and lever can be anything or nothing.
- Terms of language have no meaning apart from their use in a larger theory.
  - Compare to Quine's semantic holism.
- Meanings of the terms 'brake' and 'lever' depend on the uses we make of those objects.



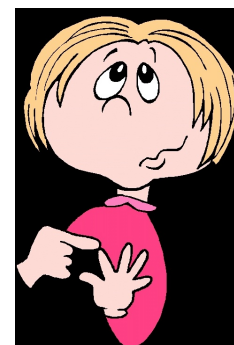
# The Community

- Number terms are directions for how to proceed.
- We use them for counting apples, for example.
- In addition, there are directions for how to proceed using the number terms alone.
- If we want to understand the number terms, then we have to analyze how these terms function.
- In particular, we have to determine how we learn the rules for counting.
- As far as we agree on the rules for counting, we have some common language, we can communicate.
- If we were to disagree on the rules, we would not understand each other.
- “If a lion could talk, we could not understand him” (*Investigations*, p 223).



# Wittgenstein's Skeptical Puzzles

- 2, 4, 6, 8, ..., 996, 998, 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012...
- We want to say that the deviant counter has made a mistake.
- Wittgenstein challenges us to justify our claim.



# Woodsellors

How could I shew them that - as I should say - you don't really buy more wood if you buy a pile covering a bigger area? - I should, for instance, take a pile which was small by their ideas and, by laying the logs around, change it into a 'big' one. This *might* convince them -but perhaps they would say: "Yes, now it's a *lot* of wood and costs more" - and that would be the end of the matter...(Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics I §150)



# Pointing?



- Number terms function differently from the Locke/Augustine account.
- Pointing can not settle any matter.
- The very act of pointing is already an action, with rules for use.
- We could point by tracing the line from the tip of our finger backwards (§185).
- See p 29 of Permanent markers
- Sandia report, see p 150 et seq. and p 262 et seq.
- For Wittgenstein, there could be no hope of communicating danger to a community completely disconnected from our own, since the meanings of our signs are connected to the practices for which we use them.



# Privacy and The Deviant Counter

How is it decided what is the right step to take at any particular stage? - “The right step is the one that accords with the order -as it was *meant*.” - So when you gave the order +2 you meant that he was to write 1002 after 1000 - and did you also mean that he should write 1868 after 1866, and 100036 after 1000034, and so on - an infinite number of such propositions?...It would almost be more correct to say, not that an intuition was needed at every stage, but that a new decision was needed at every stage. “But I already knew, at the time when I gave the order, that he ought to write 1002 after 1000.” - Certainly; and you can also say you *meant* it then; only you should not let yourself be misled by the grammar of the words “know” and “mean”. For you don’t want to say that you thought of the step... [Y]our idea was that that act of meaning the order had in its own way already traversed all those steps: that when you meant it your mind as it were flew ahead and took all the steps before you physically arrived at this or that one (*Philosophical Investigations* §186-§188).