Philosophy 308
The Language Revolution
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Class #20 - The Private Language Argument
Wittgenstein and Kripke

Business

- Two more topics after today:
  - ▸ IBS (Grice and Schiffer)
    - – Sean and Genesis
  - ▸ Tarski/Davidson
    - – Austin; Shaq and Kiyan

- Papers not due until December 9, but feel free to get started early.
  - ▸ Readings

- Today: Bringing together the traditional and Kripkenstein interpretations of the PLA

Language Analysis and Language Games
# Early Wittgenstein and Later Wittgenstein

- Frege and Russell explored the nature of propositions.
  - ‣ Frege: abstract objects consisting of the sense of the subject and the sense of a property or relation
  - ‣ Russell: abstract objects consisting of objects (logically proper names) and properties (or relations or functions) of those objects.
  - ‣ Early Wittgenstein: a proposition is true if it pictures the world (atomic constituents; logical relations)

- Later Wittgenstein rejects all of this:
  - ‣ "Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations. - For someone might object against me: "You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language. So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you yourself most headache, the part about the *general form of propositions* and of language." And this is true. -Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, - but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language"" (*PI* §65).

What is a Private Language?

- A central theme of the later Wittgenstein's work is his rejection of a private language.
  - ▸ "The individual words... 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."
- The terms of the private language may be any terms for sensations or other mental events which are available to introspection.
- We seem to have internal experiences.
- We can describe those experiences.
  - ▸ a sharp pain
  - ▸ a bright yellow
  - ▸ a sweet and spicy tang
  - ▸ a belief about how a rule extends
- But perhaps our view of the relationship between our private experiences and the world is mistaken.
- Perhaps the cause of the mistake is an errant view about language.

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.
  - ‣ We and the deviant can both be depicted as following rules.
  - ‣ A rule with an exception is still a rule.
  - ‣ "This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule" (*PI* §201).

- "But *are* the steps then *not* determined by the algebraic formula?" - The question contains a mistake (*PI* §189).
  - ‣ We need a rule to govern how to use the rule.
  - ‣ Explanations come to an end somewhere.
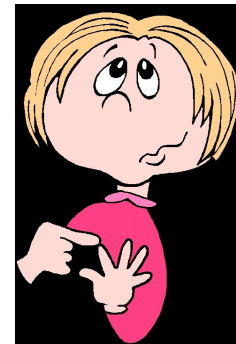
Woodsellers

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)

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 (*PI* §186-§188).

Kripkenstein

- The skeptic's claim that we meant quus when we used 'plus', is crazy.
  - The problem is to determine why it is crazy.
- There must be some fact about our past usage that makes it crazy, some fact about how we already agreed to use the language, some decision we already made.
  - But such possibilities are ruled out *ex hypothesi*.
  - "When asked for the answer to '68 + 57', I unhesitatingly and automatically produced '125', but it would seem that if previously I never performed this computation explicitly I might just as well have answered '5'. Nothing justifies a brute inclination to answer one way rather than another" (Kripke, 631).
- Intentions don't explain it
  - We have no mental representation of the rule in precisely the cases in which deviant interpretations are possible, *ex hypothesi*.
- Pointing is question-begging.
  - Presupposes rules for the pointing.
- Wittgenstein: the grounds of our using plus are the ways in which we use language.
  - "This is simply what we do" (*PI* §217).

Robinson Crusoe

- Robinson Crusoe seems to be a counterexample to Wittgenstein's claim that a private language is impossible.

- It is not a real counterexample.
  - The private language that Wittgenstein considers is not one that no one else in fact understands.
  - It is a language that no one in principle could understand.
  - "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* §243).

- But a rule is essentially an artifact of a community.
  - "It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which someone obeyed a rule. It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which a report was made, an order given or understood; and so on. - To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions)" (*PI* §199).

- Crusoe is isolated physically, but not apart from our conventions.

Rule-Following
and Private Language

- The grounds for my using a term like 'five' is not an internal mental state, a private thought, the way Locke and Augustine depicted.

- The grounds for my using 'five' in the way that we do have to do with the way that number terms are used in public, by the community.

- Mathematical rules are not categorical, in the way that they are traditionally conceived.

- There is a fundamentally conventional aspect to all of mathematics.
  ‣ To all of language

- Private acts are, in a sense, without the force of public acts.

- They lack real grounds.

Privacy and Groundlessness

Why can't my right hand give my left hand money? - My right hand can put it into my left hand. My right hand can write a deed of gift and my left hand a receipt. - But the further practical consequences would not be those of a gift. When the left hand has taken the money from the right, etc., we shall ask, "Well, and what of it?" And the same could be asked if a person had given himself a private definition of a word; I mean, if he has said the word to himself and at the same time has directed his attention to a sensation (*PI* §268).

Pic 1

The Diary
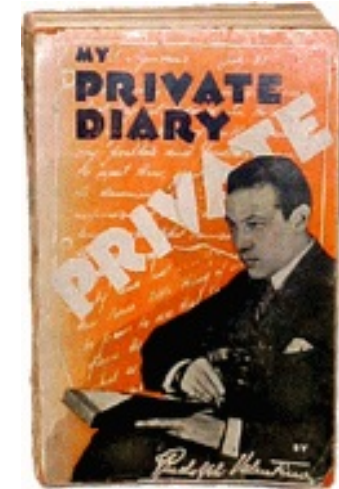
- Writing a name, 'S', for a sensation in his diary.
- Ostensive definition is inapplicable, literally.
  - "How does one point to an image? How does one point twice to the same image?" (*PI* §382).
- We might concentrate our attention to the sensation.
- Still no language has been constructed.
  - "I 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* §258).
  - "Don't consider it a matter of course that a person is making a note of something when he makes a mark - say in a calendar. For a note has a function and this 'S' so far has none (*PI* §260).
- There is no way to determine whether the same sensation is being felt each time we write 'S'.

Regularity

- Language demands a kind of regularity (*PI* §207).

- But, there is no ground for assuming regularity among the instances in which I write 'S', since they are all private.

- "Every action according to the rule is an interpretation...And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice. 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 thing as obeying it" (*PI* §§201-2).
  - ‣ The bridge at (*PI* §267)

- Following a rule is an action, a practice, governed by public criteria, rather than a mental affirmation of a description of those actions.

Sensations:
Not Somethings, Not Nothings

- "What am I to say about the word "red"? - that it means something 'confronting us all' and that everyone should really have another word, besides this one, to mean his *own* sensation of red? Or is it like this: the word "red" means something known to everyone; and in addition, for each person, it means something known only to him?" (*PI* §273).

- The beetle in the box, §293.
  - ‣ We can divide through, or subtract out, the beetle itself, while continuing to talk about beetles.
  - ‣ The language-game of beetles presupposes no beetles.
 - ‣ Our language of sensations presupposes no (private) sensations.

Identity and Sensation

- "What is the criterion for the sameness of two images? - What is the criterion for the redness of an image? For me, when it is someone else's image: what he says and does. For myself, when it is my image: nothing. And what goes for "red" also goes for "same" (*PI* §377).

- We talk about sensations in ways that at least seem to presume their reality.
  - We have introspective awareness of our sensations.
  - We discuss and compare our sensations with those of other people.
  - We ask questions about whether we all feel the same kind of pain.
  - We wonder whether there are inverted spectra (*PI* §272).

- Wittgenstein says that we make decisions to raise these questions, that they do not necessarily arise (*PI* §303).
  - Once we decide to talk about sensations, we seem more committed to them than we should be, *PI* §308.
  - They are artifacts of the grammar we adopt, *PI* §298.
  - Our talk is no evidence of their transcendent reality.

- Note: This is a (skeptical?) metaphysical claim about the reality of the objects of introspective awareness arising from considerations of language.
  - So...what about mathematical and other third realm objects?

Conventionality and Mathematics

- Traditionally, we think of mathematics as completely independent of our interests or conventions.

- Two and five are seven, independently of us.

- Mathematical facts are like transcendent physical facts, like the earth's revolution around the sun and unlike the fact that we drive on the right-hand side of the road.

- For Wittgenstein, controversially, mathematics is conventional.
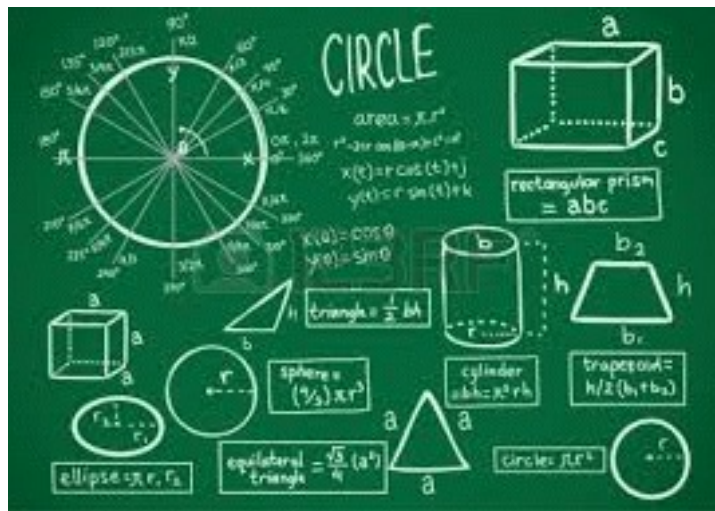
Kripke on
Wittgenstein's Conventionalism

- Kripke insists that Wittgenstein does not believe that the truth of a mathematical claim depends only on popular agreement.

- He cites Wittgenstein in support of his claim:
  - "Certainly, the propositions "Human beings believe that twice two is four" and "Twice two is four" do not mean the same" (Kripke 636, *PI* p 226).

- But, see the rest of the original passage:
  - "The latter is a mathematical proposition; the other, if it makes sense at all, may perhaps mean: human beings have *arrived* at the mathematical proposition. The two propositions have entirely different *uses*. - But what would *this* mean: "Even though everybody believed that twice two was five it would still be four"? - For what would it be like for everybody to believe that?" (*PI* p 226)

- It looks, I think, as if Wittgenstein thinks that there is something Moore-paradoxical about the traditional claim that mathematics is independent of us.

Moore-Paradoxicality

- Moore's so-called paradox is an assertion of the form:
  ‣ p but I don't believe that p
  ‣ It is raining, but I do not believe that it is raining.

- Moore-paradoxical sentences are self-refuting.

- You can not both assert a sentence and sincerely not believe that sentence, on pain of contradiction.

- Wittgenstein claims that we can't know what 'pain' means and then be in doubt about whether we are in pain (§288)

- Similarly, we can't believe (as a convention) one claim in mathematics while it is really false.

Conventionalism in *On Certainty*

- The apparent transcendence of mathematical claims is something like a logical fact about those sentences.

- The logic is a kind of limit on our language game.
  - "I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false. The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules" (*On Certainty* §94-§95).

- Logical propositions include Moore's 'I know that here is a hand'.
  - A river bed on which ordinary empirical propositions flow.
  - We use them to teach the use of certain terms.

- We can say that sentences like 'There are physical objects' are senseless as a way of teaching the term physical objects.

- Similarly, we can say '5+7=12' as a way of teaching the rules of arithmetic, but not to say anything about objects like 5, 7, and 12.
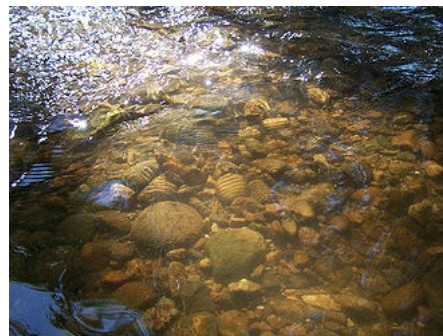
Learning Rules

- The ordinary understanding of conventional rules is that they are learned by induction over experience.

- We see a few examples and then come to a general (inductive) rule.

- Wittgenstein believes that we do not so much derive the general rule from the few instances, but use the rule as a way of organizing the instances.

- We don't learn propositions one at a time; we take on a system as a whole.

- How could you convince some one that you knew that 5+7=12?
  - You would have to convince them that you knew something much wider than that one proposition.

- "When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole.) It is not single axioms that strike me as obvious, it is a system in which consequences and premises give one another *mutual* support" (*On Certainty*, §141 - §142)

Wittgenstein and Quine

- Later Wittgenstein anticipates Quine's holism.
  - ▸ The brake and the lever

- Still, there are remnants of his earlier atomism.
  - ▸ Basic truths are almost empty in that they have little use or value.
    - – People don't fly off into space.
    - – The sun is not a hole in the vault of heaven.
    - – 2+2=4
    - – There is a material world.

- Denying these is like denying the rules of the game, changing the subject.

- Sometimes, what looks like an empirical proposition turns out not to be so.

- We can change our views about which sentences are like the river bed, and which ones are like the river.

Impermanence

- Wittgenstein has come very close, in asserting the continuity of river and riverbed, to abandoning all hope for firm and permanent claims about the world.

- If any proposition can be taken as bedrock...
  - and any can be part of the river...
  - then it seems conventional whether we hold logic or mathematics steady...
    - or whether we hold religious...
    - or moral...
    - or just crazy views as bedrock.

- We might even hold idealist claims as bedrock, or skeptical ones.

Conclusion

Does Kripke Get Wittgenstein Right?

- Is the PLA essentially a corollary of the arguments about rule following?

- Are the claims about a language of sensations essentially focused on that specific case?

- An open question

- Kripke's case is certainly helped by Wittgenstein's claim:
  - "The paradox disappears only if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts - which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please" (PI §304).

The Kripkenstein Skeptical Solution

- Kripke 632
  - ‣ A straight solution shows that skepticism is unwarranted; we do know.
  - ‣ A skeptical solution shows that the question is ill-formed.
- Wittgenstein appeals, if Kripke is right, to the community's values.
- There are serious questions about the status of our conscious states.
- The community which sets the standards which fix the meanings of our terms has freedom to choose alternate rules.
  - ‣ The wood-sellers

A Straight Solution

- Ruth Millikan proposes an evolutionary explanation of rule-following.

- We follow the rules that we do because we are hard-wired as a result of natural selection to do so.

- We are justified in using plus, rather than quus, or for counting in the standard manner, by the rules which are grounded in our biology.

- "Whether this biological purposing is innate... or whether it is derived via learning, mechanisms of concept formation, etc., it must *ultimately* derive its content from the details of our evolutionary history. So, unless doing arithmetic results from a total breakdown of the cognitive systems... then *whatever* you mean to do when you encounter "plus," that content has been determined by your experience coupled with evolutionary design" (648-9).

Deriving an Ought from an Is

- Millikan derives a normative conclusion from her evolutionary biological solution.
- She says that it provides a standard, how one ought to add or count, and which predicates one ought to use (or see as justified in using).
- While we might defend an economy of free wood, or even of selling wood by the strength of the woodcutter, it seems that there are no real alternatives for measuring the wood.
- We ought to multiply in particular ways, add in particular ways, and count in particular ways.
- Biological purposiveness only supports rules which are conducive to survival.
- Mathematical facts and rules may be, and are traditionally, seen as independent of evolutionary imperatives.
- Of course, we might give up the traditional interpretation.