

Philosophy 308
The Language Revolution
Russell Marcus
Fall 2014

Class #21
Wrapping Up The Private Language Argument
On to IBS

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 thus 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.
- The basic propositions are like a riverbed; the contentful are like the river.
- We can change our views about which sentences are like the river bed, and which ones are like the river.
- But denying basic claims is like denying the rules of the game or changing the subject.

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.

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

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

A Straight Solution

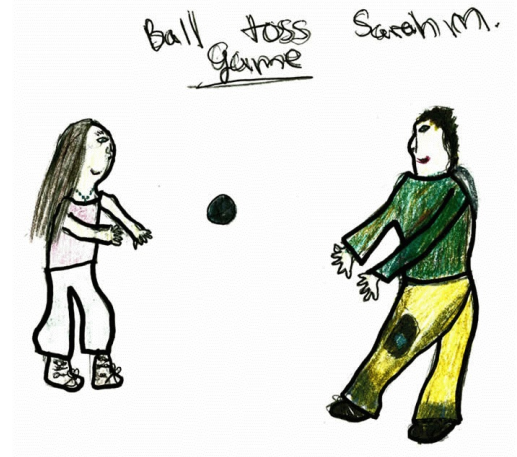
- Ruth Millikan proposes an evolutionary explanation of rule-following.
- We follow the rules that we do because we are hard-wired as a result of natural selection to do so.
- We are justified in using plus, rather than quus, or for counting in the standard manner, by the rules which are grounded in 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.

Revenge of Locke on Communication

- 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.
- Wittgenstein's private language argument (PLA) takes this view to be utterly misguided.
- Still, we have thoughts.
 - They are not a nothing.
- We communicate our thoughts.
- Someone might believe that we could provide an account of meaning based on our thoughts, if not our sensations.



Genesis and Sean On Grice