

Philosophical Investigations

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A new exposition of the 'private language argument': Wittgenstein's 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"'

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Philosophical interpretation of the work of a major philosopher often takes on a life of its own, so that discussion focuses on the positions taken in the most influential interpretations of certain key passages or theses. In the case of the 'private language argument', a term that Wittgenstein may never even have used – it does not occur anywhere in his published writing – much of the debate is entirely independent of his alleged views on the topic. This state of affairs has arisen because most philosophers have taken it for granted that he must have been giving some argument from theses that we can all accept to the conclusion that a private language is impossible, and have only disagreed about the form the premises must take and whether the arguments they have found are successful. As a result, they have seen the various argument sketches that Wittgenstein offers in certain passages of *Philosophical Investigations*¹ §§243 ff. as hinting at an argument concerning his conception of the relationship between experience and language that can and should be spelled out in detail. One of the passages most frequently cited in this connection is §258, where Wittgenstein concludes his discussion of giving oneself a private definition of a sign by saying that:

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.

Another passage that has provided the basis for a whole family of arguments against the possibility of a private language reads as follows:

1. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, G.E.M. Anscombe and R. Rhees (eds.) translation on facing pages by G.E.M. Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953.)

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.²

But it is no accident that Wittgenstein never turned these proposals into the systematic formulations of the 'private language argument' that so many of his interpreters have provided. For the passages in question were meant to show that certain philosophical theories, such as solipsism, phenomenalism, verificationism, or mind-body dualism, and the intuitions that give rise to them, are incoherent, not that some other theory is correct. The focus of this paper is Wittgenstein's exposition of his ideas about private language in a set of lecture notes that bear the title 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"' (MS 166 in von Wright's catalogue). The philosophical lecture in question was the annual "Philosophical Lecture" of the British Academy, a lecture on a philosophical topic by a distinguished speaker for a general audience. He was invited to give the 1942 lecture in April 1941, but later declined, citing the pressure of other work. This manuscript, written almost entirely in English, has recently been published in *Philosophical Occasions: 1912–1951*³, an anthology that includes all Wittgenstein's previously published shorter writings. The exposition in the 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"' is often much blunter and much more straightforward than the nuanced and elusive treatment one finds in the *Investigations*. Presumably because the piece was written six years after the more wide ranging and exploratory 'Notes for Lectures on "Sense Data" and "Private Experience"' and was designed with a general audience in mind, it provides a much more clearly focussed treatment of the privacy of experience.⁴ These notes are not directly based on MSS 119–121, the German manuscript notes from 1937–1938 that are one of the principal manuscript sources of the remarks in the *Investigations* on private language.⁵ But, as we shall

2. *Philosophical Investigations*, Part II, 207.

3. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Occasions: 1912–1951*, J. Klagge and A. Nordmann (eds.) (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993 447–458.)

4. This material, edited by Rush Rhees to about two thirds of its original length, was first published in the *Philosophical Review* 77 (1968) 275–320. There is a full transcription in *Philosophical Occasions: 1912–1951*, 200–288.

5. References to typescript and manuscript numbers are to the catalogue of the Wittgenstein papers in G.H. von Wright's 'The Wittgenstein Papers', originally published in the *Philosophical Review* 78 (1969), 483–503. The catalogue has been modified to include subsequent information; the current version is included in *Philosophical Occasions: 1912–1951*.

see, the more subtle and nuanced approach in the *Investigations*, where Wittgenstein engages in dialogue with opposing voices rather than elaborating a positive view, is essentially an elaboration and development of the critique he set out in these lecture notes.

Before turning to this manuscript, I would like to briefly consider why Wittgenstein's treatment of private language has had such a mixed reception and suggest that it is directly related to the character of the difficulties he struggled with in his philosophical work. The following passage from the *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* sums up the difficulty:

It is difficult to put the body of fact right side up: to consider the given as given. It is difficult to place the body differently from the way one is accustomed to see it. A table in a lumber room may always lie upside down, in order to save space perhaps. Thus I have always seen the body of fact placed like *this*, for reasons of various kinds; and now I am supposed to see something else as its beginning and something else as its end. That is difficult. It as it were will not stand like that, unless one supports it in this position by means of other contrivances.⁶

It is well known that Wittgenstein aimed to bring about a change in the way philosophers see things, a change in perspective that would make us aware of what we ordinarily take for granted. In the *Investigations*, he speaks of 'turning our whole examination around',⁷ so that obvious facts about ordinary life and language undermine what other philosophers take for granted when they try to answer philosophical questions. There, he described his own conception of his approach to philosophy as though he were simply stating incontestable commonplaces, but that other philosophers had totally failed to see their significance:

If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them.

The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless *that* fact has at some time struck him. – And this means: we fail to

6. L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* III §§54, 130 (second edition, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967.) Also in the third, revised, edition on p. 254 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978.)

7. *Philosophical Investigations*, §108.

be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful.⁸

As if to confirm his insistence that we are unable to recognize what we take for granted, there has been very little agreement over what he meant by the 'real foundations' of enquiry, or 'considering the given as given'. While he denied that he was advancing philosophical theses and his style of writing was far from conventional, most of his interpreters have found an astonishing variety of conventional philosophical theses of one kind or another in his writing. If one does not take his remarks about our inability to see what is obvious seriously when reading his work, one is very unlikely to see the point of his work. One of the main reasons for this state of affairs is that philosophers are so accustomed to the current place of his writing in the philosophical lumber room that it requires an effort to see it the right way up. To be specific, most philosophical readers have looked for proofs and refutations, rather than a change of perspective, and have taken the *Tractatus* and *Investigations* to be the definitive expressions of Wittgenstein's philosophy, rather than seeing them as selections from a much larger body of work. As a result, these readers often confuse the 'contrivances' he used as devices to get us to see the facts the right way up, from his own articulation of what 'everyone would agree to'. The compressed character of the remarks in the *Tractatus* and *Investigations*, especially when they are taken out of context, has made it particularly easy for philosophers to treat the remainder of his writing as marginal, and to find their own concerns and commitments echoed in those central texts.

With these warnings in mind, let us turn to Wittgenstein's 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"'. In that manuscript, he characterizes the conception of language and experience he opposes in the following terms:

We mustn't think that we understand the working of a word in lang[ua]ge if we say it is a name which we give to some sort of [private] experience which we have. The idea is here: we *have* something it is as it were before the mind's eye (or some other sense) and we give it a name. What could be simpler? One might

8. *Philosophical Investigations*, §§128–129. Cf. the Big Typescript, p. 419, in Wittgenstein, 1989, "Philosophie" §§86–93 (S. 405–435) aus dem sogenannten "Big Typescript" (Katalognummer 213)' H. Nyman (ed.) *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 43 175–203. English translation by C. G. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue, 1991, as 'Philosophy: Sections 86–93 (pp. 405–35) of the so-called "Big Typescript" (Catalog Number 213)' *Synthese* 87, 203–226.

say /could put it roughly this way/: All ostensive definition explains the use of a word only when it makes one last determination, removes one last indeterminacy.⁹

In other words: any public act of ostensive definition is ambiguous until one establishes a private link between the word and something within experience. Wittgenstein begins his notes by discussing the crucial question of what he means by 'private experience'. In his opening paragraph, he describes this privacy as a 'superprivacy'. In taking our everyday notion of privacy out of context and applying it to experience as a whole, he charges philosophy with transmuting it into a 'superconcept', a concept that is apparently significant but because it has been deprived of the specific context that gave it its meaning, it no longer does any real work.¹⁰ Wittgenstein describes the 'essential characteristic' of privacy in the following terms:

Nobody but I can see it, feel it, hear it; nobody except myself knows what it's like. Nobody except I can get at it.¹¹

But this is still potentially ambiguous, for there is a crucial difference between a case of everyday privacy, on which nobody can know about what I choose to keep private unless I tell them about it, and the superprivacy on which I can't show my feelings, no matter what I do.

Privacy of feelings can mean: nobody can know them unless I show them, or: I can't really show them. Or: if I don't want to, I needn't give any sign of my feeling but even if I want to I can only show a sign and not the feeling.¹²

9. L. Wittgenstein, 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"', 447-8. The following editorial conventions are employed:

"/" was used by Wittgenstein to separate variant drafts

"/" is used to enclose alternative wording that Wittgenstein wrote above his original draft

(" and ") are used for Wittgenstein's parentheses

[and] are used for editorial insertions or conjectural readings

Underlining is used for Wittgenstein's underlining

Broken underlining is used for Wittgenstein's wavy underlining, indicating that he was dissatisfied with the words in question.

"this→" stands for "this" followed by an arrow. Presumably the arrow stands for the act of pointing which accompanies the demonstrative use of the word.

10. Cf. *Philosophical Investigations*, §97.

11. 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"', 447.

12. 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"', 447.

Wittgenstein argues that this ambiguity creates a dilemma for the defender of the notion of 'private experience', and the associated conception of inner ostension as a matter of privately applying names to sensations, and that either horn of the dilemma leads back to ordinary language. If he or she means by this nothing more than everyday privacy, then talk about experience is on the same level as the rest of our language, and inner ostension plays no particularly privileged role in establishing the meaning of terms for what we see. If he or she means to talk of superprivacy, then the language in question has been cut off from our everyday language, but at the price of robbing it of any sense at all. Either the putative private linguist has tacitly presupposed the categories and techniques from our ordinary use of language in setting up the private language, in which case it is not really private, or the inner ostension really is *sui generis*. But if one does not make that tacit presupposition in setting up one's 'private language', nothing has been said, for no criterion has been established that would give content to the supposed act of inner ostension.

Most discussions of the 'private language argument' turn on disagreement over Wittgenstein's reasons for thinking that no private criterion could be set up governing the use of a term for inner experience, where this is understood as a criterion that would enable one to judge whether what I am now experiencing is (or is not) the same as the experience one originally named. This is what Norman Malcolm has called an 'internal' attack on private language: one assumes, for the sake of argument, that an act of private inner ostension has taken place, and then shows that the idea that one could go on to make use of such a definition in isolation from any check on one's usage is incoherent.¹³ One begins by imagining the purported private linguist using a sign on a given occasion, and then argues that when the person next tries to use that sign, he or she will be unable to distinguish between using it correctly or incorrectly, and so nothing has been achieved. However such arguments usually depend on an appeal to some form of verificationism, or scepticism about a solitary speaker's abilities, challenging the speaker's memory or ability to check his or her usage. In effect, this move depends on selectively raising sceptical questions about an individual's use of

13. N. Malcolm, 'Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*' *Wittgenstein: the Philosophical Investigations*, G. Pitcher (ed.) (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 65-103, especially 65-75.

words that could just as well be applied to the community.¹⁴ These interpretations fail because they try to do too much: they turn an objection to a theory Wittgenstein opposes – if you conceive of inner ostension as primary, and attempt to construct the outer out of the inner, you will be unable to even talk about the inner – into a free-standing argument for a positive theory of mind, a theory which is usually constructed by taking some of his hints and suggestions about how to understand our use of language and turning them into a system of dogmatic theses. For instance, his remarks about the importance of use in understanding the meaning of words, or of expression in the case of first person avowals, are frequently read as implying a ‘use’ or ‘assertability condition’ theory of meaning and an ‘expressive’ theory of avowals.¹⁵

One might naturally expect the internal argument against a private language to be complemented by an external argument that a private language could never get started. But while Malcolm is clearly in sympathy with such a train of thought, it only plays a

14. If the sceptical argument that a single speaker of a language can never know what he or she means is a good one, then it can equally well be levelled against a linguistic community. Conversely, if there is a solution to the sceptical problem that works for the community, then an isolated individual ought to be able to make use of it too. In a footnote added while his book on the subject was in proof, Saul Kripke alluded to such difficulties but left further discussion for another occasion. See *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) n. 87, 146. The chief difficulty for defenders of the ‘community view’ lies in justifying the claim that it is in principle impossible for a person who is not part of a community to speak a language. For if one examines the standards that are supposedly set up and maintained by a linguistic community, it is not so difficult to think of cases in which an isolated person, with sufficient ingenuity and intelligence, might also satisfy those standards. For further discussion see my ‘Recent Work on Wittgenstein, 1980–1990’, *Synthese* (March 1994).

15. For instance, a recent linguistics textbook sets out the ‘Use Theory of meaning’ as follows:

Advanced by Ludwig Wittgenstein in the 1930s, it has more or less dominated Anglo-Saxon theorizing about meaning for the past fifty years. Properly construed, it is, we think, a promising theory. Like the previous theories of meaning, this one can be formulated as a slogan:

(U) The meaning of an expression is determined by its use in the language community.
 . . . The main problem with the Use Theory of meaning is that the relevant conception of use must be made precise, and the theory must say how, exactly, meaning is connected to use.

Linguistics: An introduction to language and communication, A. Akmajian, R.A. Demers, A.K. Farmer and R.M. Harnish (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, third ed., 1990) 201. For a recent exposition of Wittgenstein’s ‘thesis of the expressive sense’ of first person self-ascriptions, see Ernst Tugendhat, *Self-Consciousness and Self-Determination*, trans. Paul Stern, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986) lecture 6.

peripheral role in his exposition.¹⁶ Yet if we turn to Wittgenstein’s exposition we will find that it does contain an external attack on private language: he not only argues ‘internally’ that the private linguist would have no way of knowing if he or she was using a privately defined term correctly on a subsequent occasion, but ‘externally’ that the supposed private act of ostension fails to introduce a term in the first place. In response to his outline of the view that ‘we have something . . . before the mind’s eye . . . and . . . give it a name’, Wittgenstein offers some observations about what is actually involved in using a name significantly. He begins with a telegraphic summary that hints at the topics of the opening sections of the *Investigations*: ‘The relation between name and object. Language game of builders’.¹⁷ He then asks himself ‘What is the relation between names and actions names and shapes?’ and replies ‘The relation of ostensi[vely]’¹⁸ defining. That’s to say, in order to establish a name relation we have to establish a technique of use’. This appeal to a technique of use is a central thread in his discussion of naming in the ‘Notes for the “Philosophical Lecture”’. Wittgenstein tries to show us that ostension in particular, and language as a whole, always depend on a practical context; so that ostensive definition, whether it concerns inner or outer objects, always depends on a prior context of practices and institutions. For a technique of use is a practice, a linguistically structured procedure that may be contingently private, in the sense that I may choose to keep it secret, but if it is conceived of as ‘superprivate’, we are simply misdescribing and misunderstanding what we ordinarily do.

Wittgenstein’s point here is not that we could not go on to use a private definition consistently, but is much more elementary: that nothing one could actually do would ever amount to setting one up, for the role of training and practice in language prevent a ‘private linguist’ from using a sign to mean anything at all, even once.

16. Malcolm’s example of a supposedly external argument still starts from the perspective of an isolated consciousness: he cites Wittgenstein’s attack on the idea that I can start from knowledge of my own case and then transfer these concepts to objects outside myself, arguing that self-ascription of conscious states only makes sense if one is prepared to ascribe them to others (‘Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*’, 75–77.) But this still depends on taking the first person predicament as primary.

17. ‘Notes for the “Philosophical Lecture”’, 448.

18. The text reads ‘ostensibly’, but the remainder of the paragraph makes it clear that this is a slip for ‘ostensively’, as he is talking about successful ostensive definition, not just seeming to define.

This is not the epistemological problem that one would have no reliable test, or no test at all, as to whether one was using language correctly, but rather logical: the stage-setting necessary for one to be able to say anything at all would not be in place.¹⁹ On this reading, the discussions of rule-following (§§138–242) and private language (§§243 ff.) in the *Investigations* both develop aspects of the treatment of training and practice in the opening sections.²⁰ §§28–34, where Wittgenstein sums up his case that public ostensive definition presupposes a prior grasp of language, closely parallels the latter discussion of private ostensive definition. In both passages he argues that the bare act of pointing does not determine a referent. §28 observes that ‘an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in every case’, because the hearer may take it to be defining any one of a variety of possible categories of ‘object’: a number, a name, a colour etc. Of course, the ostensive definition can be disambiguated by specifying the category in question, but that presupposes the hearer grasps the relevant distinctions; it shows ‘the post at which we station the word’ (§29). One can only ask what something’s name is if the question’s ‘place is already prepared’ (§31). And in §257, he makes it clear that the same problems arise in the case of inner ostension:

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 giving 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.

In the ‘Notes for the “Philosophical Lecture”’, the appeal to the ‘grammar of the word “pain”’ is foreshadowed in Wittgenstein’s reference to ‘techniques of use’. In a passage that is probably directed at Russell, although it seems to anticipate Kripke, he characterizes the view that ‘it is a peculiar process of christening an object which makes a word the word for an object’ as a kind of

19. See Fogelin *Wittgenstein*, first edition 138–152 and second edition 155–165. See also B. Stroud ‘Wittgenstein’s “treatment” of the quest for “a language which describes my inner experiences and only I myself can understand”’, *Proceedings of the 7th international Wittgenstein symposium*, P. Weingartner and J. Czermak (eds.) (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1983.)

20. Cf. Kripke, who does briefly discuss §1 and §§28–34 in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, but only as partial anticipations of the sceptical paradox, thus subsuming the main concern of those passages under his own.

‘superstition’.²¹ Instead, it is only possible to actually name something, as apart from going through a ceremony that one thinks of as attaching a name to an object within a practical and linguistic context. And such a ‘technique of use’ is always potentially public:

So it’s no use saying that we have a private object before the mind and give it a name. There is a name only where there is a technique of using it and that technique can be private; but this only means that nobody but I know about it, in the sense in which I can have a private sewing machine. But in order to be a private sewing machine, it must be an object which deserves the name ‘sewing machine’, not in virtue of its privacy but in virtue of its similarity to sewing machines, private or otherwise.²²

‘Technique of use’, as the term is used in the ‘Notes for the “Philosophical Lecture”’, does not neatly map onto any one of Wittgenstein’s terms in the *Investigations*. The English translation uses the term ‘technique’ in a variety of contexts. It covers both the ‘technique of use’ the private linguist fantasizes about, as in §262: ‘Is it to be assumed that you invent the technique of using the word; or that you found it ready-made?’²³ but also the ‘customs (uses, institutions)’ that he insists are constitutive of any language at all. In a passage that appears to advance the debatable theses that Wittgenstein aims to avoid, he writes:

– To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are customs (uses, institutions).

To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of a technique.²⁴

One of the ways he avoids the danger of turning these observations about our natural history into substantive philosophical theses is by

21. Cf. *Philosophical Investigations* §49, §110 on superstition, and the following passage from the ‘Notes for Lectures on “Sense Data” and “Private Experience”’ on p. 290 of the Rhees edition:

But what is it like to give a sensation a name? Say it is pronouncing the name while one has the sensation and possibly concentrating on the sensation, – but what of it? Does this name thereby get magic powers? And why on earth do I call these sounds the ‘name’ of the sensation? I know what I do with the name of a man or of a number, but have I by this act of ‘definition’ given the name a use? ‘To give a sensation a name’ means nothing unless I know already in what sort of a game this name is to be used.

22. ‘Notes for the “Philosophical Lecture”’, 448.

23. The German is *Technik dieser Anwendung*; ‘technique of application’ would be a better translation.

24. *Philosophical Investigations*, §199. There are also uses of ‘Technik’ in §§125, 150, 205, 232, 337, 520, 557, 630, 692; and on pp. 208, 226 and 227.

using a wide variety of examples, voices, trains of thought, and a range of alternative terms with overlapping areas of applicability: form of life (*Lebensform*), practice (*Praxis*), use (*Gebrauch*), custom (*Gepflogenheit*), application (*Anwendung*). Instead of turning the primacy of praxis into a doctrine, he offers us examples of our agreement in the use of language, showing how these practices are part of what he calls 'our natural history' and how they depend on 'certain very general facts of nature'.²⁵ In a preparatory draft for Part II of the *Investigations*, he lists some of these everyday practices, and insists they must be treated as a given:

Instead of the unanalyzable, specific, indefinable: the fact that we act in such-and-such ways, e.g. *punish* certain actions, *establish* the state of affairs thus and so, *give orders*, render accounts, describe colours, take an interest in others' feelings. What has to be accepted, the given – it might be said – are facts of living//forms of life.//²⁶

They have to be treated as a given because any explanation of what words mean presupposes that this background is, for the most part, already in place. For if we try to specify everything one has to know in order to understand statements about punishing a specific action, establishing a state of affairs obtains, or simply ordering someone to open the door, those sentences will also have to be understood, and that will presuppose further practical abilities on the part of the reader.

But in these lecture notes, drafted in English for a general audience, instead of in his more nuanced German, the notion of a 'technique of use' receives a central role. Wittgenstein explicitly acknowledges that some members of his audience are likely to be hostile to his approach and offers a defence of his method:

But before explaining what I mean I must make a preliminary remark. For I know that some of you will think this is the worst kind of verbalism. So I must make a general remark about grammar and reality.²⁷

25. *Philosophical Investigations*, §25 and Part II, 230; see also the remarks quoted below in note 31.

26. L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, volume I, G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (eds.) translation by G.E.M. Anscombe (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980) §630. The last sentence is an early version of a remark in *Philosophical Investigations*, II, 226.

27. 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"', 448.

He then proposes that we think of the structure of our language, and the relationship between the structure of our language and the states of affairs it is connected with, as analogous, in certain crucial respects, to a method of measurement and the results that applying that method lead to:

Roughly speaking, the relation of the grammar of expressions to the facts which they are used to describe is that between the description of methods and units of measurement and the measures of objects measured by those methods and units.²⁸

A few years earlier, Wittgenstein had thought that this comparison supported a picture theory, or a verificationist theory of meaning.²⁹ But now he suggests that the real philosophical moral of the comparison between methods of measurement and techniques of use is that it helps us to see certain 'general truths' that they each presuppose. As an example of this, he points out that he 'could describe the shape and size of this room' by giving its dimensions in either meters or microns, and so there is a sense in which choice of the units is arbitrary. But 'in a more important sense', he maintains, the choice of unit is not arbitrary:

It has a most important reason lying both in the size and in the irregularity of shape and in the use we make of a room that we don't measure its dimensions in [microns]³⁰ or even in m[illi]m[eters]. That is to say, not only the prop[osition] which tells us the result of measurement but also the description of the method and unit of measurement tells us something about the world in which this measurement takes place. And in this very way the technique of use of a word gives us an idea of *very* general truths about the world in which it is used, of truths in fact which are so general that they don't strike people, I'm sorry to say, and philosophers, too.³¹

28. 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"', 448–9.

29. For further discussion of this change in his outlook, see my *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

30. Here Wittgenstein uses the Greek letter mu, 'μ', the standard scientific abbreviation for a micron (a millionth of a meter).

31. 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"', 449. Cf. the following passages:

What we have to mention in order to explain the significance, I mean the importance, of a concept, are often extremely general facts of nature: such facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their great generality. (*Philosophical Investigations*, §56).

What we are supplying are really remarks on the natural history of human beings; we are not contributing curiosities however, but observations which no one has doubted, but which have escaped remark only because they are always before our eyes. (*Philosophical Investigations*, §415; cf. *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, I §141).

In the case of the units of measurement, the truths we do not usually notice concern the scale on which we ordinarily operate. In the case of words such as 'feeling pain', we turn the meaning of the word into an object, assimilating it to cases where we do pick out an object and identify it. Immediately after this methodological interlude, Wittgenstein continues by characterizing some of the relevant aspects in the case of talk about pain:

And so I will turn to some points in /features of/ the technique of use of expressions like 'feeling pain'. The first point is this: that this verbal³² expression is, in the first person, used to replace an expression of pain. So that if some people say that 'having pain' in the end refers to pain behaviour we can answer them that 'I have pain' does not refer to pain behaviour but is a pain behaviour. It corresponds to a cry of pain, not to the statement 'I am crying'.³³

What he is proposing here is not a preliminary semantics for first person self-ascription, but rather some reminders and comparisons that are meant to help us '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'.³⁴

Near the beginning of the 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"', Wittgenstein makes it clear that he considers the myth of private inner ostension itself is to be understood as a misunderstanding of our ordinary (potentially public) techniques of use, techniques that must be established by training children to use words in certain ways before explanations of meaning can gain a foothold:

How a kind of object is hypostatized for a technique of use. This word refers to this → object that word to that → object. Explanation of the object referred to not by pointing but by explaining a technique. Colour-words, shape-words, etc.

Under what circumstances pointing can explain i.e. convey the use of a word. Not to a baby. It learns by being drilled. There is therefore no occult act of naming an object that in itself can give a word a meaning.³⁵

Toward the end of the manuscript, Wittgenstein returns to these issues once more when he criticises the idea that understanding a

32. Wittgenstein's use of wavy underlining in manuscripts and broken underlining in typescripts was his way of indicating his dissatisfaction with his choice of words.

33. 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"', 449.

34. *Philosophical Investigations*, §304. Cf. the role accorded to expression in §244.

35. 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"', 447.

word consists in the ability to produce a mental image or picture of the appropriate sort. But while he is quite prepared to concede that there is a connection between understanding and imagining, he rejects any theory along these lines as a prototypical philosophical error:

When we philosophise we are constantly bound to give any account of our technique of the usage of words and this technique we know in the sense that we master it, and we don't know it in the sense that we have the very greatest difficulty in surveying it and describing it.³⁶

This is why philosophers have so much difficulty in interpreting Wittgenstein's writing: because he engages with what we take for granted in philosophizing, we are always in danger of turning his work into an anticipation of our own favourite theory, rather than responding to his challenge to philosophical theorizing.³⁷

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36. 'Notes for the "Philosophical Lecture"', 456

37. Earlier versions of this paper were read at a Wittgenstein symposium at the Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in March 1992 and at a meeting of the Central States Philosophical Association in October 1992.