

# Discussions of a Private Language: Wittgenstein and Rhees

Volker Munz

Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt, Austria

**Abstract** One year after the publication of *Philosophical Investigations*, the discussion about a private language had already gathered pace. Since then, the debate has moved in various directions: discussions about Wittgenstein's method of doing philosophy; about how to read him; about variations of 'private' language users; about private experiences, (private) ostensive definitions, behaviourism, the 'inner' and 'outer' etc. I have tried to cover those points, which I think crucial for the understanding of a 'private' language: the rule-fixing problem, the confusion of giving and using a sample, private charts, knowledge, memory, and justification. In doing so I have thereby made extensive use of remarks by Wittgenstein and Rush Rhees, particularly Wittgenstein's manuscripts, the Whewell Court lectures 1938-41, and unpublished material by Rhees. The reason for this is that I could not have put it in any better words, and that for me these remarks speak for themselves. I hope that others will have a 'similar' experience.

**Keywords** Robinson Crusoe. Wallpaper pattern. The rule-fixing problem. Giving and using a sample. Private charts. 'Subjective' knowledge. Memory. Justification.

**Summary** 1 (Methodological) Remarks on Sense and Nonsense. – 2 Varieties of Private Language. – 2.1 "Another Person Cannot Understand the Language". Regarding PI, § 243. – 2.2 Giving a Sample and Using a Sample. Ostensive Definitions, Private Objects and the Rule-fixing Problem. – 2.3 Robinson Crusoe and the Wallpaper Pattern. – 3 Subjective Knowledge and the Private Chart Inspector. – 4 Subjective Memory and Justification: Apropos PI, § 258.



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## 1 (Methodological) Remarks on Sense and Nonsense

Wittgenstein's discussion of the possibility of a private language certainly ranks as one of the most debated philosophical issues over the last seventy years. In 1954, Alfred Ayer and Rush Rhees initiated the debate in a symposium titled "Can there be a private language". Since then, the discussions have taken various directions - some linked to Wittgenstein's general method of doing philosophy, others related to various solitary men scenarios and the role of society in the invention of a private language, and some focusing on the general distinction between sense and nonsense, argument and therapy.

The main aim of this paper is to provide the readers with an overview of unknown or hardly known remarks from Wittgenstein's unpublished manuscripts and his *Whewell Court Lectures 1938-41*, as well as hitherto unpublished notes by Rush Rhees. What makes this new material so important is that it may shed some fresh light on the already existing old ways of reading and understanding Wittgenstein's discussion of a private language. The publication of this vast amount of new material may thereby help to see some of the old readings and standard interpretations from a different perspective.

In his review of the *Investigations*, Malcolm points out that Wittgenstein's discussion of a private language provides an argument in the form of *reductio ad absurdum* by postulating a 'private' language and then deducing that it is not a language in the first place. Malcolm also identifies other external arguments in Wittgenstein attempting to challenge the idea of a private language, such as PI, § 283 (cf. Malcolm 1954, 537).

In his paper "The Private Language Arguments", Peter Hacker argues that it might be misleading to speak in terms of just a singular argument, as Wittgenstein's discussion of the possibility of a private language is actually based on several arguments dealing with questions of epistemic privacy, private ownership, and private ostensive definitions (cf. Hacker 2019, 1). However, other philosophers, such as Barry Stroud, reject the idea of an argumentative structure in Wittgenstein's discussion of a private language. He writes:

There is widespread agreement that what Wittgenstein does with the idea of such a language is to *refute* it - that he simply proves that a private language is impossible. And from that proof many powerful philosophical conclusions about the relation between body and mind, about our knowledge of other minds, and about the nature of psychological concepts - and no doubt about other things as well - are thought to follow and thereby to constitute Wittgenstein's philosophy of mind. Now I believe that no such conclusions or theories - and especially those widely discussed semantic theses we have heard so much about which would link 'behavioural

criteria' to 'mental concepts' - are to be found in Wittgenstein's text. In fact, I think it was an important part of Wittgenstein's own conception of what he was doing and of what needed to be done that no such philosophical doctrines or conclusions should be found there. (Stroud 2000, 69)

This debate about argument versus nonsense has also given rise to a broader question of how to interpret the private language debate in the first place. (For a more in-depth discussion of various readings, the resolute-substantial distinction, the Pyrrhonian-non-Pyrrhonian distinction, cf. Candlish 2019.) The different shifts within the whole issue have various reasons. Particularly, the question of whether 'private language' is a concept we understand, or whether the concept is nonsensical, has fuelled the debate on how to interpret Wittgenstein's responses to his fictitious opponents.

Concerning his methodology, Wittgenstein stands out as a philosopher who is particularly unique in employing a myriad of thought experiments, especially in his discussion of an essentially private language. He is less involved in offering counter-arguments to his interlocutors but rather invites us to meticulously go through each of his developed experiments - always approaching them afresh from different directions - (cf. Wittgenstein 2009, ix), to see where and how far the experiments will lead us when philosophising. In PI, § 374, Wittgenstein remarks:

The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there were something one *couldn't* do. As if there really were an object, from which I extract its description, which I am not in a position to show to anyone. - And the best that I can propose is that we yield to the temptation to use this picture, but then investigate what the *application* of the picture looks like. (PI, § 374)

This remark seems crucial to me for understanding Wittgenstein's method of doing philosophy: introducing a thought experiment, going through it, and trying to discern what its application would look like and where it might lead us. Similarly, in PI, § 422, Wittgenstein poses the question of what I am actually believing when I believe, for example, that men have a soul or that a substance contains two carbon rings. His answer is:

In both cases there is a picture in the foreground, but the sense lies far in the background; that is, the application of the picture is not easy to survey. (PI, § 422)

And he continues:

*Certainly* all these things happen in you. – And now just let me understand the expression we use. – The picture is there. And I am not disputing its validity in particular cases. – Only let me now understand its application.

The picture is there; and I do not dispute its *correctness*. But *what* is its application? (423-4)

These remarks are also connected with Wittgenstein's general approach to doing philosophy, characterised by treating a philosophical question like an illness (cf. PI, § 255). Stroud points out that those

who demand philosophical results in the form of storable philosophical propositions or theories will no doubt remain disappointed or worse. [...] Those who seek 'results' in that way *should* remain disappointed with Wittgenstein. This is still better, I think, than inventing a set of definite doctrines and then claiming to find them, perhaps evasively suggested or only rhetorically expressed, in his unsystematic text. (Stroud 2000, 79)

Thought experiments, in my view, are often more effective in conveying a philosophical point than straightforward, systematic philosophical arguments. Dennett refers to thought experiments as 'intuition pumps' and notes:

Such thought experiments are not supposed to clothe strict arguments that prove conclusions from premises. Rather, their point is to entrain a family of imaginative reflections in the reader that ultimately yields not a formal conclusion but a dictate of 'intuition'. (Dennett 2015, 13)

Malcolm also points out that assuming a private language is possible or even necessary would not be 'eccentric' but rather 'natural' for anyone contemplating the relation between words and experiences (cf. Malcolm 1954, 531).

However, these natural or 'intuitive' approaches also carry the risk of leading in misleading directions from the very beginning. In PI, § 308, Wittgenstein uses the marvellous analogy of a *conjuring trick* to highlight this danger: When dealing with mental and physical processes, the first step often goes unnoticed because we already use terms like 'states' and 'processes', leaving their nature open. But this initial step commits us to a particular perspective, and we then strive to understand these states and processes better. The crucial step in the conjuring trick has already been taken, even though it seemed 'innocent' (cf. PI, § 308). Hence, caution is needed when taking the first step within a particular thought experiment. Wittgenstein provides

numerous examples of propositions that appear meaningful at first glance because we are familiar with their components. Also in the case of a ‘private’ language, there seems to be an unassuming first step. We talk about a language without determining its nature, but this already commits us to view it in a particular way, that is as a kind of *language* yet to be determined.

In PI, § 261, Wittgenstein warns against reverting to our ordinary language when trying to find a sign for a sensation because ‘sensation’ is already a word in our common language. Calling it ‘something’ instead does not help because this expression is also part of our common language. If the term ‘something’ has any meaning, it has a public meaning (cf. PI, § 261) A similar remark is found in “Notes for a Philosophical Lecture” (cf. NPL, 449).

If we regard the combination of the words ‘private’ and ‘language’ senseless, this does not mean as some readers seem to suggest that we are dealing with some kind of Meinongian ‘impossible object’, which, according to Meinong, has a particular kind of being, because without a prior understanding of impossible objects, such as a round square, we would not be able to ascribe impossibility to them (cf. Meinong 1981, 76-117). Leaving aside what Wittgenstein would say about “impossible objects” this way of reading his discussions of an essentially “private language” would be very misleading. There isn’t a private language,

something determinate that we cannot do, the idea that there is something, namely, a private language, that cannot be achieved; there is not a limitation on language. Rather, the idea is simply nonsense. (Candlish 2019)

In PI, §§ 499-500, Wittgenstein notes that to say of a combination of particular words that it has no sense, excludes it from the realm of language, thereby delimiting its area.

When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But a combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation. (PI, § 500)

In *Philosophical Grammar*, Wittgenstein reinforces a related point by questioning why we are more inclined to say that we cannot imagine something being otherwise rather than admitting that we cannot imagine the thing itself. For instance, we tend to consider a sentence like “This rod has a length” as a tautology rather than a contradiction. Instead of deeming both “This rod has a length” and “This rod has no length” as nonsense, we tend to affirm the first sentence as verified, thereby overlooking that it is a *grammatical* proposition. Once again, Wittgenstein emphasises that it is not the sense of these propositions

that is senseless, but rather these words are excluded from language in the same way arbitrary noises are: “[A]nd the reason for their explicit exclusion can only be that we are tempted to confuse them with a sentence of our language” (PG, 130. Cf. also Diamond 1991).

In PI, § 251, Wittgenstein revisits this example in the context of someone claiming that her mental images are private or that only she can know whether she is feeling pain, etc.:

But the picture that goes together with the grammatical proposition could only show, say, what is called “the length of a rod”. And what should the opposite picture be? (Remark about the negation of an a priori proposition.)

“This body has extension.” To these words, we could respond by saying: “Nonsense!” – but we are inclined to reply “Of course!” – Why? (PI, §§ 251-2)

In PI, § 464, Wittgenstein presents a vivid picture of his teaching aim when he notes: “What I want to teach is: to pass from unobvious nonsense to obvious nonsense” (PI, § 464). This, to me, is one of the central tenets of his methodology, demonstrating that Wittgenstein is not primarily concerned with the distinction between something being true/false or nonsensical, but rather with revealing unobvious nonsense. This nevertheless implies that transitioning from unobvious to obvious nonsense will impart crucial philosophical insights.

The words of an ordinary English sentence like “My images are private” or “Only I can know when I am in pain” are as nonsensical as some arbitrary noises, even though we are inclined to perceive them as true. This inclination arises because we are tempted to regard the sentence “as a sentence of our language”. Instead, we must once again move from unobvious to obvious nonsense.

In “What Nonsense Might Be”, Cora Diamond convincingly argues that

for Wittgenstein, there is no kind of nonsense which is nonsense on account of what the terms composing it mean – there is as it were no ‘positive’ nonsense. Anything that is nonsense is so merely because some determination of meaning has not been made; it is not nonsense as a logical result of determinations that have been made. (Diamond 1981, 15)

Moreover, as Diamond points out:

There is no ‘positive’ nonsense, no such thing as nonsense that is nonsense on account of what it would have to mean, given the

meanings already fixed for the terms it contains. This applies even to Wittgenstein's discussions of privacy. (16-17)

It is noteworthy that Wittgenstein frequently refers to fairy tales, fictional stories, poems, etc., when discussing sense and nonsense, both unobvious and obvious. It is therefore not accidental, I believe, that Wittgenstein remarks at one point that philosophy should only be poetised (cf. MS, 146, 25v). Particularly in his lectures spanning over more than ten years, Wittgenstein often brings up fictional literature while discussing the concept of nonsense:

In his 1935-36 lectures on 'private' experience and 'sense data', Wittgenstein begins to speak about different kinds of nonsense, such as "I feel his pain", and English sentences containing a meaningless word like 'abracadabra', or a string entirely composed of nonsense words. Regarding "I feel his pain", Wittgenstein remarks:

Every words in the sentence is English, and we shall be inclined to say that the sentence has a meaning. The sentence with the nonsense word or the string of nonsense words can be discarded from our language, but if we discard from our language "I feel Smith's toothache", that is quite different. The second seems nonsense, we are tempted to say, because of some truth about the nature of things or the nature of the world. We have discovered in some way that pains and personality do not fit together in such a way that I can feel his pain. The task will be to show that there is, in fact, no difference between these two cases of nonsense though there is a psychological distinction in that we are inclined to say the one and be puzzled by it and not the other. We consistently hover between regarding it as sense and nonsense, and hence the trouble arises (24.10.1936; Macdonald, unpublished. Cf. also Diamond 1981).

One reason for distinguishing between kinds of nonsense, as Wittgenstein puts it, is a psychological inclination to say one and not the other or to oscillate between seeing something as sense and seeing it as nonsense. Similarly, in his notes for those 1935-36 lectures, he points out that it seems not to be false but rather meaningless to say that I can feel someone else's pain due to the nature of pain and the person, as if I were making a statement about the nature of things:

So we speak perhaps of an asymmetry in our mode of expression and we look on this as a mirror image of the nature of the things. (LPE, 277)

In his "Lectures on Belief" from Easter term 1940, Wittgenstein gives the example of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. I will quote the passage in full:

The other day I read a book which I didn't understand, "Paradise Lost". Right at the beginning, it is said that Satan lies in hell a time which measured in our time would be nine days. (Earth hadn't been created.) Now you might say: "What exactly does this mean?" Suppose that this had been a scientific observation of his. If this were a scientific observation, we might say we don't know for our lives what it means. How does he compare? "If Satan had lived ..., he would have asserted 'nine days.'" First of all, it can't be given as an explanation, if it had been, it would have been said. Suppose that it were said by a physicist: "Before the earth and the sun existed, a certain event happened, which lasted nine days, as we would now say". Would you understand this? Would it be clear to you what this means? I mean, wouldn't the scientist have to give a brand new explanation? How does one measure a time? - It's like saying "It's five-o'clock on the sun".

In a fairy tale, "When it was five-o'clock on the sun, they had tea". Should we say "It is impossible to understand what is said in the poem"? On the other hand, if we took it to be a scientific statement, would it be relevant to know how things are compared? You might make some such remark as: "Oh, these poets, they don't bother their heads" - if you say this, has he [Milton] overlooked anything? Could this, as it were, be improved upon? Mr Lewy said: "Well, in a scientific work, I wouldn't understand it, in a poem I would". By the way, I don't understand it in "Paradise Lost" either. Couldn't you say: either this makes sense, or it doesn't? "Either it makes sense or the poet has made a blunder." It is important that a lot of people, and I among them, don't understand it. Not because I had thought about how it was verified. I should for instance say, "I don't know why he said nine days".

Context is a very complicated thing indeed. The statement puzzles us in a certain context. The statement only *sounds* queerer, than "the children lived on the sun, where it was five-o'clock". This may be as important as anything else. It would not puzzle us at all. As it doesn't puzzle us, when in a fairy tale three drops of blood spoke. If he (a scientist) said "The drop of blood spoke", I might have said, "What on earth do you mean?" It would be a question of understanding what he means. Whereas in a fairy tale, I wasn't in the faintest degree puzzled. (WCL, 238-9)

Interestingly enough, Wittgenstein picks up the "five-o'clock on the sun" example again in PI, § 350, in the philosophical context of notions such as "He feels the same as I". He points out the mistaken claim that if I knew what it meant to be five o'clock here, I would also understand the sentence "It is five o'clock on the sun" similar



to saying that if she has pain then she has the same as I do when I have pain.

For what's surely clear to me is *this* part of grammar: that one will say that the stove has the same experience as I, *if* one says: it's in pain and I am in pain. (PI, § 350)

In *Mental Acts*, Peter Geach refers to an example Wittgenstein gave during his 1946-47 "Lectures on the Philosophy of Psychology". It is the example of Lytton Strachey's imaginative description of Queen Victoria's dying thoughts. Geach notes:

He [Wittgenstein] expressly repudiated the view that such a description is meaningless because 'unverifiable'; it has meaning, he said, but only through its connexion with a wider, public, 'language-game' of describing people's thoughts; he used the simile that a chess-move worked out in a sketch of a few squares on a scrap of paper has significance through its connexion with the whole practice of playing chess. (Geach 1957, 3-4)

In the later publication of the lectures, we find the following alternatives:

Lytton Strachey describes Queen Victoria's dying thoughts. But what is the use of this? As it stands there, it has no use at all. (LPP, 32. Geach's notes)

Lytton Strachey on Queen Victoria's dying thoughts. How could he know? And if not, does he talk sense? (LPP, 99. Shah's notes)

Remember Lytton Strachey talking of the thoughts of Queen Victoria on her deathbed. If he could not conceivably know, what sense could this have? If no sense, why say it? (LPP, 229. Shah's notes)

What did Queen Victoria think as she lay dying? There is no verification *accessible* to 'What did the Queen think?' Then shall we say that Strachey was guessing at what she thought? You may. But it's a different use of 'guess' from the use we learned; another game. (LPP, 274. Jackson's notes)

In his "Lectures on Description" from Lent term 1940, Wittgenstein uses the example of a man saying: "Ultra-violet is a non-spectral colour". It is clearly a well-formed English sentence and may be uttered with a particular tone of conviction. But all the man really does is making queer English noises. The sentence just does not fit into any of the games into which similar sentences fit. Wittgenstein goes on:

You could imagine nonsense poems of Lewis Carroll not to have been a joke. – “Does one of the sentences of Lewis Carroll’s poem make sense or not?” It is not easy to answer. It does in a way. We have images, it has been illustrated, etc. In a sense, it does make sense; in a sense it doesn’t. We can’t say there is a large province of our language with sentences of this kind. [...]

When should one say, “This does make sense”, “This doesn’t make sense”? – It is very often very clarifying to cut off altogether one sort of expression from a certain game. Just as some people say: “Poems like Lewis Carroll’s make no sense”, this is quite all right. It might be very useful to say “This has no sense”, “This has”. This doesn’t mean that it [the sentence] isn’t of any use. The answer can never be categorical at all.

If one says it makes no sense, this means on the whole trying to dissuade the other man from saying it. It means: “Don’t say that”. (WCL, 167-8)

In his “Reply to a Paper by Y. Smythies on ‘Understanding’”, Wittgenstein makes a similar remark:

Suppose, on being asked whether I understand the sentence “The blind man imagines”, I answered (“No”), and Lewy said, “Honestly, don’t you understand it at all?” – the only thing that I could say is: “Well, it depends. What sort of thing do you oppose it (understanding) to? To Lewis Carroll? Do you understand it as you understand ‘A = A’? It is a different case. You don’t know what verifies or falsifies it, but you can easily suggest something which you or I might take”. Very often, given an expression in English, I could give you all the task: “You tell me what it might be used for” – that is to say, besides a meaning which is fixed, there is also something else, the next meaning that we give it. Cf. “This man married green”. “This hasn’t a meaning.” – No one says this about mere noises, because the question doesn’t arise. (WCL, 193)

Lewis Carroll’s examples, among others, illustrate that the distinction between what makes sense and what does not is not a straightforward one. Wittgenstein suggests that we often stagger between regarding something as sense and as nonsense, leading to trouble. In this context, he seems to propose that there is no real difference between uttering an ordinary English sentence, such as “The blind man imagines”, and making arbitrary noises like ‘abracadabra’.

Two additional examples involve fairy tales in the context of nonsensical propositions. In *Philosophical Grammar*, Wittgenstein writes about a schoolboy equipped with elementary trigonometry skills who

is asked to test a complex equation. According to Wittgenstein, the boy would neither know how to answer the question nor understand it. He compares this situation to the task set in a fairy tale where a prince asks a smith to fetch a “fiddle-de-dee (Busch, Volksmärchen.)” (PG, 378-9. Cf. also PR, 178). And in the sections on private language in PI, Wittgenstein makes another remark:

“But in a fairy tale a pot too can see and hear!” (Certainly; but it *can* also talk.) “But the fairy tale only invents what is not the case: it does not talk *nonsense*, does it?” – It is not as simple as that. Is it untrue or nonsensical to say that a pot talks? Does one have a clear idea of the circumstances in which we’d say of a pot that it talked? (Even a nonsense-poem is not nonsense in the same way as the babble of a baby.) (PI, § 282)

These quotations present various cases of unobvious nonsense, many from literary contexts, that need to be made explicit. Ultimately:

The results of philosophy are the discovery of some piece of plain nonsense and the bumps that the understanding has got by running up against the limits of language. They – these bumps make us see the value of the discovery. (PI, § 119)

## 2 Varieties of Private Language

### 2.1 “Another Person cannot Understand the Language”. Regarding PI, § 243

The discussion of the private language is typically situated between paragraphs 243-315 of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein presents an initial version of the kind of ‘language’ he has in mind:

A human being can encourage himself, give himself orders, obey, blame and punish himself; he can ask himself a question and answer it. So one could imagine human beings who spoke only in monologue, who accompanied their activities by talking to themselves. – An explorer who watched them and listened to their talk might succeed in translating their language into ours. (This would enable him to predict these people’s actions correctly, for he also hears them making resolutions and decisions.)

But is it also conceivable that there be language in which a person could write down or give voice to his inner experiences – his feelings, moods, and so on – for his own use? Well, can’t we do so in

our ordinary language? But that is not what I mean. The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know – to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language. (PI, § 243)

PI, § 243 states that a man can encourage himself, command himself, obey, blame, punish, put a question to himself, and answer it. Therefore, Wittgenstein argues that we can even imagine people who speak only in monologues. In the MS 165 version (cf. MS 165, 103-6), he had begun by saying that in one particular sense we could speak of a ‘private language’, namely that of a Robinson Crusoe who speaks only to himself. Speaking to oneself, however, does not mean being alone and speaking. I can as well speak to myself when others are also there. Already in the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein remarks:

We could perfectly well, for our purposes, replace every process of imagining by a process of looking at an object or by painting, drawing or modelling; and every process of speaking to oneself by speaking aloud or by writing. (BBB, 4)

In *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, we read:

Only someone who can speak can speak in his imagination. Because part of speaking in one’s imagination is that what I speak silently can later be communicated. – (LWI, § 855)

In a letter to Wisdom, dated 15 June 1954, Rhees writes:

I may say to myself, “Where did I put the pen?” or “What is the matter with me?”. But granting that Ayer’s Crusoe might make these sounds too, he would still not be asking himself a question. I cannot ask myself a question unless I can *understand* a question. Speaking a language means, for instance, asking questions and giving orders. And that has its sense in what people do with one another. If a man talks to himself, that is not just making noises. And the difference is that they are noises that he has used and that he has heard in his discourse with other people. He knows what they mean (not: he knows what he uses them for). (Rhees, unpublished)

And later:

If a man speaks to himself, he speaks in some language; and a language is spoken by others. Otherwise, he would not be saying anything to himself. I do not say that a man cannot speak a language unless he speaks it with others. I say he cannot speak a language

unless it is spoken by others. And I would add also: he has learned it. (Rhees, unpublished)

In PI, § 344, Wittgenstein raises the question of whether it would be conceivable that people should never speak an audible language but nevertheless speak a language inwardly in their imagination. He then gives the following answer:

Our criterion for someone's saying something to himself is what he tells us as well as the rest of his behaviour; and we say that someone talks to himself only if, in the ordinary sense of the words, he *can talk*. And we do not say it of a parrot; or of a gramophone. (PI, § 344)

In the final PI version, Wittgenstein uses 'speaking in monologues' instead of 'speaking to himself', because the concept of 'speaking to myself' might be misleading. In the MS 180a version, which is only slightly changed in PI, the expression "only in monologues" is followed by a parenthesis ("So each of them might also have a language of his own. How he could learn it is irrelevant"). Wittgenstein invites us to imagine a society or group of people who would only speak monologues, a group exclusively of such people, again a quite radical thought experiment. So, we might imagine that each member of the group has come from a different society, in which he might have learned to speak with other people, and then, as Rhees puts it, "he became quasi-autistic". He notes:

Apparently, the language of each monologue could also have been spoken in dialogue of people with one another. – This is suggested when Wittgenstein says that each of these inhabitants accompanies his actions by conversing with himself, and that a scholar (sociologist) who observed them and listened to their talking might translate their language into ours. – What was spoken in monologue would be a language in the same sense as ours is. With grammatical rules such as ours has. "(and then he could predict their actions correctly, for he can hear them formulate plans and decisions.)" Here, as with the question raised in PI, § 206, "The way of behaving which is common to human beings is the frame of reference for our interpretation of a language that is foreign to us." And added to this, the regularity, which was wanting in what first seemed to be a language of people imagined in § 207. (Rhees, unpublished)

In MS 165, Wittgenstein starts talking about a language, someone only talks to herself only for her understanding about her personal experiences. At this point, Wittgenstein does not delve into the discussion of such a language, as it pertains to the problems of idealism

and solipsism. He does, however, point out that no language has actually been described in this context, although it appears to be, because there is obviously no assurance that a word in this language is used twice with the same meaning. If you say, e.g., that some objects are equal if they appear equal to you, I might ask how the objects appear to you because after all 'equal' is a term in a common language (cf. MS 165, 101-3). We find a similar remark about 'sensation', 'something', and 'having' in PI, § 261.

In another sense, there can, of course, be a private language like that of a Robinson Crusoe who talks only to himself. He could, e.g., encourage himself with words to do something, could ask himself a question and answer it or blame himself, etc. According to Wittgenstein, we would only call such a phenomenon language if the behaviour of this person was similar to that of humans in general. And if we especially understood his gestures and facial expressions in the context of sorrow, displeasure, joy, etc., we could call this a language or a language-like phenomenon (cf. MS 165, 103-4). In MSS 124 and 149, Wittgenstein makes similar remarks about Crusoe talking to himself on his island and emphasises that if someone had listened to and observed Crusoe, she could have learned Crusoe's language, since the meaning of his words would show themselves in his behaviour (MS 124, 221-2). Accordingly, in MS 149 he notes:

We can indeed imagine a Crusoe using a language for himself but then he must behave in a certain way or we shouldn't say that he plays language games with himself. (11v)

Wittgenstein continues MS 165 by introducing the case of a human being "who lives alone and draws pictures of the objects about him (say on the wall of his cave), and a picture-language of this sort could easily be understood" (105). But Wittgenstein points out that such a person who encourages herself is thereby not also able to master the language game of encouraging another person. Thus, the ability to speak to oneself does not necessarily imply the ability to speak to others, any more than someone who can play patience must also be able to play card games with others. Similarly, there can also be a language-like phenomenon: a language that each person speaks only to herself, thinking, e.g., about her future actions. A language is primarily something spoken by the peoples of the Earth. And we label as language those phenomena that bear resemblance to those languages. Ordering, for instance, is a technique of our language. So one can give oneself commands. But if we were to observe a Robinson Crusoe giving himself a command in a language unfamiliar to us, it would be much more challenging for us to recognise (cf. MS 165, 105-9). Wittgenstein continues with a remark which later moved to PI, § 206, when he notes:

Suppose you came as an explorer into an unknown country with a language quite strange to you. In what circumstances would you say that the people there gave orders, understood them, obeyed them, rebelled against them, and so on? The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language. (PI, § 206)

Later in MS 165, Wittgenstein introduces a Crusoe alternative. He starts again by inviting us to imagine a person talking to herself:

Suppose a human being (say a cave-man) spoke always to himself alone. Imagine a situation in which we might say: "Now he is thinking over whether he should act in this way or in that. Now he is ordering himself to act so." It is possible to imagine something like this, if he makes use of simple drawings, which we can interpret. (MS 165, 117)

But then, Wittgenstein continues by introducing a new case, in which someone invents a game which neither she nor anyone else will ever play:

Commands are sometimes not followed. But how would it appear if commands were never followed? Today, I can invent a game that neither I nor anyone else will ever play. However, what would it look like if games were never played but only invented? Now, can I not imagine that? Occasionally, someone takes paper and pencil, designs the plan for what we would call a game (such as tennis), and writes down the rules of the game. He might add: it would be nice if we acted this way. So why did I say that this condition cannot be imagined? Well, if it existed, and we saw it, the question is whether we would associate it with our concept of the game. Especially if the games corresponding to those plans were very different from those commonly used by us. (117-19)

Wittgenstein finishes the experiment with the well-known remark from PI, § 284: "Transition from quantity to quality" (MS 165, 120). These various examples obviously show the thin line between what we can imagine in the case of solitary men and when we transcend the line of what still makes sense.

In MS 116, Wittgenstein also introduces a Robinson Crusoe who uses a language for his private use, a case that does not seem to fall under the different variations Wittgenstein allows in the first paragraph of PI, § 243. He writes:

Language, as far as one understands it subjectively, may not serve as a means of communication with others but rather as a tool for

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an individual's private use. The question, however, is whether we would still consider this utterance of sound combinations or the drawing of lines, and the like, a 'language' and whether we would still call it a 'tool'. For he would have to play language games with himself and he can indeed do so. Imagine a Robinson Crusoe who uses a language (signs) for his private use; imagine observing him (without his knowledge); you would see how, on various occasions, he carves lines into wood, utters sounds. Would we in all cases call this 'using signs'? Only if you were to observe a specific regularity. We observe a person who, on different occasions, emits sounds without any regularity - now we say, "This may be a purely private language; he probably associates the same thing with the same sound each time." (MS 116, 117-18)

Wittgenstein continues with one of the central remarks in his discussions of a private language, which we find in PI, § 264 voiced by his private language opponent: "Once you know what the word signifies, you understand it, you know its whole application", a remark which will be particularly crucial in the context of a private ostensive definition. In this remark, the quotation marks are, of course, essential.

During his stay in Bergen in autumn 1937, Wittgenstein was also concerned with a particular idea of a private language, which does not seem to be part of the cases covered by the first part of PI, § 243. Although he starts with the already familiar notion of someone talking to herself, this time his example refers to a colour concept such as 'blue', which a person might use to refer to a colour that comes to her mind, without bothering whether others would agree with this usage or not. In such a case, Wittgenstein argues, the person would ask herself what she could indeed do with such a language and whether we would still call it a language (cf. MS 119, 95v).

Several pages later in the same MS, Wittgenstein notes:

How can one give a name to a private object? What does it mean to recognize the private object? Does it mean essentially the same as believing to recognize it? 'Recognition' already implies certain public criteria. This seems to erase language almost as if it has been turned off. We are completely in the dark. We realize that the word 'red', for example, is only a word in our public usage. As soon as we retreat into the private, language ceases to exist; the word 'red' loses its use. (MS 119, 124r, 124v)

This remark already includes central issues of the private language debate such as giving a name to a private object, recognising the private object, and the role of public criteria (cf., e.g., PI, §§ 256, 260, 580).



Again, in the following MS 120, Wittgenstein connects the notion of a private language with that of a private object:

“There is, after all, a subjective regularity, a regularity that exists only for me.” That is to say, we sometimes use the word ‘regularity’ in a way that suggests someone envisions a regularity, sees something regular, or perceives it as regular, and so on. However, this doesn’t mean he has an object in front of him that none of us knows, and he calls it ‘regularity’. If he is playing, besides the game I see, another one with himself that I know nothing about, then I don’t know whether what he is doing should be called “playing a game”. If, in addition to the public language, he speaks with himself in a private one that I know nothing about, why do I say it is a language? How do I know that it is a language? So, it seems he is playing, besides the game I see, another one with himself, which I know nothing about – but why do I call that a ‘game’? In other words, we use the picture of the ‘private object’ that only he can see, and not others. It is a picture – be clear about that! And now, it is inherent in the nature of this image that we make further assumptions about this object and what he is doing with it; (because) it is not enough for us to say: He has a private something and does something with it. (MS 120, 27-8)

These considerations are obviously connected to the kind of private language Wittgenstein introduces in the second part of PI, § 243, i.e. a language another person *cannot* understand. The example also differs from the solitary men cases in so far as the ostensible users of such a private language are also familiar with a common language. What it further shows is that Wittgenstein does not deny the idea of a private object in the first place. He does not immediately dismiss such a picture but instead invites us again to get clear about this very picture we are using here and that we are using a picture. Then we have to see what we could do with it and where it would get us. In other words, there is nothing wrong with introducing a particular picture, as long as we are able to tell what we are supposed to be doing with it, what *use* we will make of it, how we will go on.

As we have seen so far, Wittgenstein discusses different kinds of solitary men, Crusoes, and cavemen over a period of about eight years. What these examples show is that Wittgenstein distinguishes cases where it *would* make sense to talk about using a private language when it shows similarities to our common language use, such as regularities, familiar behaviour, the possibility to learn such a language, translate the language, etc. In his “Robinson Crusoe Sails Again: The Interpretative Relevance of Wittgenstein’s *Nachlass*”, Peter Hacker convincingly argues that Wittgenstein did not show any

concerns about a speaker or a group of speakers who use a contingently private language. Hacker remarks:

Wittgenstein discussed solitary people who follow unshared rules in many different manuscripts in his Nachlass between 1936-37 and 1944. In none of these numerous remarks, did he express any qualms about the conceivability of speakers with an innate knowledge of a language, or about speakers who speak a contingently private language. Throughout these discussions, his focus is unquestionably on the requirement of regularity seen as uniformity and conceived as a norm, not upon the requirement of multiplicity of agents. (Hacker 2010, 106-7. For the so called ‘community view’ cf. Candlish 2019)

It is, however, interesting that most of the cases Wittgenstein introduces in his manuscripts did not make it into PI. We could indeed ask, as Hacker also does (Hacker 2010, 107), why Wittgenstein did not include those discussions of the various solitary men in the *Investigations*. I assume there are various reasons. First of all, all those cases where Wittgenstein argues that we could very well imagine someone or a group of people using a particular kind of private language are, as I would want to call them, ‘harmless cases’ of private language users. All of those harmless cases already seem to be covered by the first part of PI, § 243. An explorer who listened to them and observed their behaviour could, in principle, translate their language into ours. So, these seem to be the unproblematic cases of people using such a language. Wittgenstein seems far more interested in a language in which a person would write down her inner experiences for her own use and another person *could* not understand this language.

In a letter to C.W.K Mundle, dated 3 April 1965, Rhees comments on Mundle’s “‘Private Language’ and Wittgenstein’s Kind of Behaviourism”. He writes:

Of course, Wittgenstein knew that the sense of ‘privacy’ he was discussing was a special and queer one. This is just what he was trying to bring out in a large part of his discussion. He was *not* denying that there are other senses in which people may speak of ‘private languages’. And of course he was not denying that I can tell the doctor how I feel. He is talking about a particular idea of a language [...] He is *not* saying that a “private language must be of this sort”. He is talking *about* the idea of this sort, and about the sense in which it is supposed to be ‘private’ (or ‘incommunicable’). The ‘language’ in which I know what I mean – ‘the inner language’ which we might say *is* my understanding or my meaning; but which I cannot express to you directly, but only ‘indirectly’ by, as it were, translating it into the common language. The idea that

“there is a limit to what we can communicate”. Or perhaps: “I can never know whether the content which you put into my words is the content which they had for me” - and so on. (Rhees, unpublished)

Secondly, as Rhees’ remarks and Wittgenstein’s own writings show, Wittgenstein was obviously less interested in cases where someone grew up in a strictly asocial context, without any knowledge of a common language, but rather in people who would, besides using a public language, also invent an essentially private language for their own use. At least PI, §§ 243, 256-8, 261, 265, 270, and others seem to suggest that the seemingly private language user is also familiar with a public language. In the same letter, Rhees gives the example of Samuel Pepys’ diaries that were written in shorthand and sometimes in code:

Wittgenstein agreed that you might say that Pepys had a private language (although it might be more accurate to call it a private cipher). This sense of “private language” has nothing to do with what he is examining. And your use of “used to refer to a private experience” - if it is illustrated by the expressions you use to tell the doctor of your symptoms - is not what he is discussing either. (May I repeat: he is *not defining* private experience or “private symbol” in any particular way and then saying that it cannot be used in any other way.) (Rhees, letter to Mundle, 3 April 1965)

In his “Lectures on Similarity” (Michaelmas 1939), Wittgenstein gives us an example of a diary user, different from Pepys’ case, who is also capable of speaking a common language:

Robinson Crusoe invented a language and used it for himself. Imagine that you have a diary in which you write down your experiences:

Monday	x
Tuesday	X0
Wednesday	∂

etc. “What’s all this?” “A private language.” “What does it describe?” “I’m afraid I can’t tell you.” What reason have I to believe that I mean by the language what I do? That I mean by the language all that I claim I mean? If you say “It is a private language describing experiences”, this has as much meaning to me as the word “experience” has. “Is it pains?” “No”. “Is it religious experiences?” “No”. On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday he makes different scratches. What is at all similar here to a language? I

wouldn't know at all whether to say that it is a *private* language. All I know is that he makes scratches and says that it is a private language. But suppose that he makes scratches and says "I can't explain". Suppose he says "If X is repeated it's the same experience". I can't be sure whether to say he is using a private language. If this were the rule that people made scratches and said "I can't explain", etc. there would be nothing more I could call a private language. This – the kind of situation where we say there is a private language – is only possible because it is exceptional. You may say "There's something here I can't explain." (WCL, 95-6)

Here again, I get the impression that Wittgenstein wants to warn us not to make general inferences from exceptional cases. In the context of the concept 'sense-datum', which to me seems equally applicable to the term 'private language', Wittgenstein remarks:

We said that there were cases in which we should say that the person sees green what I see red. Now the question suggests itself: if this can be so at all, why should it not be always the case? It seems, if once we have admitted that it can happen under peculiar circumstances, that it may always happen. But then it is clear that the very idea of seeing red loses its use if we can never know if the other does not see something utterly different. (NPL, 285)

Here, too, the decisive movement in the conjuring trick seems to have been made: the innocent move from the exceptional case to the general one. A representative example for this 'innocent' step is Alfred Ayer's development of the "Argument from Illusion" (cf. e.g. Ayer 1963, 1-57). Or, as Wittgenstein puts it:

"If people talked only inwardly, to themselves, then they would merely be doing *always* what, as it is, they do *sometimes*." – So it is quite easy to imagine this; one need only make the easy transition from some to all.

"What sometimes happens might always happen." (PI, §§ 344-5)

Similarly, sometimes orders are not obeyed, but if we assume that no orders would ever be obeyed then the concept of 'order' would have lost its entire purpose (cf. PI, §§ 344-5).

Thirdly, Rhees points out that Wittgenstein did not include either of the remarks about the caveman's drawings in the *Investigations*. He notes:

As I remember a conversation in 1945, Wittgenstein grew more hesitant about saying "we can imagine" that someone who had

never communicated with others or lived in their company would make drawings of objects and use them deliberating (as we should say) on what to do. (Rhees, unpublished)

Wittgenstein discussed questions closely related to these issues in §§ 41 to 43 in *Remarks on Foundations of Mathematics*. According to Rhees, the manuscript of part VI (MS 164) was written probably six months or a year later than MS 165. These remarks certainly show that the line between the harmless and the essential cases is indeed not always clear and might make us hover again between the meaningful cases and the nonsensical ones: Wittgenstein again introduces a caveman who produces regular sequences of particular marks just for himself and draws them on the cave walls. But we would still not say that he is following the general expression of a particular rule. And if we want to say that the person does act in a regular manner, this is not because we are able to form such an expression. The point is that a word has a meaning only within the practice of a particular language. I can, of course, give myself a particular rule and then follow it. But we should not think it is only a rule because it looks analogous to what we call 'rules' in our common human activities.

When a thrush always repeats the same phrase several times in its song, do we say that perhaps it gives itself a rule each time, and then follows the rule? (RFM, VI, §41, 345)

Similarly, Wittgenstein continues:

If one of a pair of chimpanzees once scratched the figure | - - | in the earth and thereupon the other the series | - - | | - - | etc., the first would not have given a rule nor would the other be following it, whatever else went on at the same time in the mind of the two of them. If however there were observed, e.g., the phenomenon of a kind of instruction, of shewing how and of imitation, of lucky and misfiring attempts, of reward and punishment and the like; if at length the one who had been so trained put figures which he had never seen before one after another in sequence as in the first example, then we should probably say that the one chimpanzee was writing rules down, and the other was following them.

It is possible for me to invent a card-game today, which however never gets played. But it means nothing to say: in the history of mankind just once was a game invented, and that game was never played by anyone. That means nothing. Not because it contradicts psychological laws. Only in a quite definite surrounding do the words "invent a game", "play a game" make sense. (RFM, VI, §§ 42-3, 345-6)

This is the reason why expressions such as ‘language’, ‘order’, ‘rule’, ‘calculation’, ‘experiment’, ‘following a rule’ are related to a particular technique and custom of acting, speaking (cf. RFM, VI, §§ 42-43, 345-6). In my understanding, these examples show that even in the case of observing a particular behaviour in a certain regularity, it is not once and for all clear whether such a scenario also guarantees the use of a language. I will come back to this point in the context of Rhees’ metaphor of a ‘wallpaper pattern’, which he uses in his reply to Ayer in 1954.

## 2.2 Giving a Sample and Using a Sample. Ostensive Definitions, Private Objects and the Rule-fixing Problem

Kripke’s famous account of Wittgenstein’s treatment of rules and private language in particular has turned Wittgenstein’s remarks into a kind of meaning scepticism. Kripke takes the problem of a private language just as a special case of Wittgenstein’s paradox in the rule-following context: “This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule” (PI, § 201). In a letter to Alfred Ayer, dated 6 July 1954, Rhees writes:

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein raises this question when he is discussing what *following a rule* is, and what grasping the meaning of an expression is, or what understanding is. This question about following a rule is of fundamental importance for the nature of logic (the relation between logic and reality, for instance) and for the nature of mathematics. And one of the things he tries to bring out is the difference between “der Regel folgen” and “die Regel deuten” – as though understanding were a matter of seeing what is contained in it, in that sense. So he says (PI, § 202) that der Regel folgen eine Praxis ist und nicht ein Deuten. And it is for this reason that einer Regel zu folgen *glauben* is not: der Regel folgen. „Und darum kann man nicht der Regel ‘privatim’ folgen.“ [...] One of the questions there is whether I can *give* myself a rule, for instance. And in this is the question of what it could mean to say that I was following the rule correctly: or what difference there could be between following it and not following it. (Last italics added)

This point is bound up, Rhees continues,

with the question of what “giving a name to something” is, and what it is for a mark or a sound to refer to something or mean something; and so with the question of whether a mark or a sound could mean something in a “private language”. If I cannot *give* myself a rule, then I cannot *give* myself names for my private sensations either;

that is why concentrating the attention, or “pointing inwardly” as I spoke a sound for myself would be an idle ceremony. (*Italics added*)

Wittgenstein’s point in PI, § 202 that to follow a rule is a practice, and that therefore one cannot follow a rule ‘privately’, because thinking that one is following a rule is not the same thing as following it, Kripke takes not only as a sceptical answer to the paradox but also to the private language case. He remarks: “The impossibility of a private language emerges as a corollary of [Wittgenstein’s] sceptical solution to his own paradox” (Kripke 1982, 68). Although it is indisputable that many of the issues Wittgenstein raises in his discussion of a private language are internally related to his former discussions of giving names to things, ostensive definitions, following rules, of saying, meaning and understanding something, this does not mean that the private language discussion was already finished with PI, § 202. In his remarks, PI, §§ 243-315, Wittgenstein covers many subjects that are not discussed elsewhere (at least to this extent), such as private experiences, private objects, private charts, private ostensive definitions, subjective knowledge, subjective memory and justification, pain and pain behaviour, mind-body relations, and many other interrelated issues (for a thorough discussion of why Kripke’s reading of Wittgenstein is mistaken, cf. Hacker 2019, 9-13). Furthermore, Wittgenstein’s own examples of solitary men, Robinson, cavemen, and monologuists also show that the ‘community’ view is not in general a good answer to the question of whether one could follow a rule privately. It is, however, important to point out that those examples, as we have seen, only seem to cover the *harmless* cases of solitary men, summarised in the first part of PI, § 243. Therefore, I would like to argue that Wittgenstein’s discussion of an ‘essentially’ private language, introduced in the second part of PI, § 243 and further elaborated in PI, § 256 and the diary case in PI, § 258, is not primarily a genuine case of a rule-following problem but to a much greater degree of a *rule-fixing* problem. Wittgenstein draws the distinction between thinking that one is following a rule as opposed to following it in the context of his private language discussion (cf. PI, § 260). Nevertheless, I think we could also apply this figure to ‘thinking that one is fixing a rule’ and actually ‘fixing a rule’. The rule-fixing problem becomes most obvious in the distinction between *giving* a sample and *using* a sample, *giving a definition* and *making a statement*, respectively.

In *Philosophical Grammar*, Wittgenstein remarks:

The concept of meaning I adopted in my philosophical discussions originates in a primitive philosophy of language. The German word for “meaning” (“Bedeutung”) is derived from the German word for “pointing” (“deuten”). When Augustine talks about the learning of language, he talks about how we attach names to things or

understand the names of things. Naming here appears as the foundation, the be-all and end-all of language. (PG, 46)

The learning of a language, the way Augustine describes it, “can show us the way of looking at language from which the concept of the meaning of words derives” (57). In his introduction to *The Blue and Brown Books*, Rhees points out that in the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein discusses the process of grasping the meaning of words by having someone explain their meanings as though ‘understanding’ and ‘explaining’ were somehow interconnected. However, in the *Brown Book*, Wittgenstein points out that learning a language game precedes this understanding. What is essential is not explanation but rather training, akin to the training provided to an animal. This aligns with his emphasis in the *Investigations* that the ability to speak and understand what is said in the sense of knowing its meaning does not necessarily imply the ability to articulate that meaning. In PI, § 32, Wittgenstein points out that sometimes a person will learn the language of a people from ostensive definitions they give her. Then the person will sometimes just have to guess the meaning, sometimes correctly, sometimes incorrectly. Augustine portrays the acquisition of human language as if a child entered a foreign land and did not comprehend its language, implying that the child already possessed a language, just not the one in question. In order to find out whether a child knows a particular language, you might ask her whether she knows what a particular expression means. However, this way you could not say whether the child could also *talk*. Neither is it what the child learns when it learns to speak a language (cf. PI, § 32; BBB, vi). According to Rhees, Wittgenstein brings the language games in both PI and the *Brown Book* to shed some light on the relations of words and what these words stand for. In PI, however, he is concerned with the Augustinian conception of meaning, which eventually holds that only the demonstratives ‘this’ and ‘that’ are real proper names, and all other words called ‘names’ would only be names in a very inexact and approximate sense (cf. BBB, ix)

It is therefore not surprising that Russell, in “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism”, notes:

A logically perfect language, if it could be constructed, would not only be intolerably prolix but, as regards its vocabulary, would be very largely private to one speaker. That is to say, all the names that it would use would be private to that speaker and could not enter into the language of another speaker. [...] A name, in the narrow logical sense of a word whose meaning is a particular, can only be applied to a particular with which the speaker is acquainted because you cannot name anything you are not acquainted with.



[...] One can use 'this' as a name to stand for a particular with which one is acquainted at the moment. (Russell 1956, 198, 201)

Wittgenstein himself defended a particular name-object relation in his *Tractatus*, which was internally related to his picture theory. In 3.2-3.22 he remarks:

In a proposition, a thought can be expressed in such a way that elements of the propositional sign correspond to the objects of the thought. [...] The simple signs employed in a proposition are called names. A name means an object. The object is its meaning. [...] In a proposition, a name is the representative of an object. [...] The requirement that simple signs be possible is the requirement that sense be determinate. (TLP, 3.2-3.23)

In his "Ontology' and Identity in the *Tractatus*" Rhees notes:

The *Tractatus* hardly distinguishes naming and calling something by its name. And 3.3 shows that this is not an oversight. 'Nur im Zusammenhange des Satzes hat der Name Bedeutung.' So we may think that what the word 'red' means is expressed by the sentence 'a is red'. Someone might say: 'the name must correspond to some reality. It cannot describe anything if there is nothing which it signifies.' Or suppose I told you: 'I call each of these roses red because each of them is red. The word I use corresponds to the colour of the flower'. - But what corresponds is the *sentence*. The *Tractatus* supposed that 'red' determines how I use it. Wittgenstein rejected this later. It confuses giving a sample and using a sample. I may give a sample - a piece of coloured paper - to explain what I mean by 'vermilion'. Or I may use the sample in place of the word and tell you 'the flowers in that bed are *this* colour'. But I cannot use the sample to explain what colour this *sample* is. (Rhees 1970, 28)

The erroneous view was to understand samples as primary signs, which unmistakably explain themselves and could not be misunderstood. And the primary signs subsequently explain secondary signs. So without the primary signs, we would not know what we are saying.

Wittgenstein brought out the confusion in all this. But it showed that the distinction between what a name means and what is called by it is not always simple or easy. (28-9)

In *Philosophical Grammar*, Wittgenstein argues that only in an irrelevant sense could one say that the truth of a sentence immediately follows from its existence, for example, if we imagine a sentence written on a wall with a red colour, "in this room, there is something

red". The reason for such a sentence being irrelevant relates to the idea that an ostensive definition is not intended to make statements about the sample itself, but rather about objects corresponding to the sample, to which it can be applied. This is what it means to confuse *giving samples* and *using samples*. For example, in the case of a particular shade of red, I can give an ostensive definition by saying, "This is called 'red'", and I can also use the sample to make statements about coloured objects corresponding to it. However, I cannot use the sample itself to make statements about its own colour. Similarly, we can neither say that the standard metre is one metre long nor that it is not one metre long (cf. PI, § 50. For Kripke's misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's discussion of the standard metre cf. Munz 2023, III.2.1).

In the case of, e.g., a colour sample, such as 'sepia', we define the word by saying that it means the colour of the standard sample sepia, which is kept somewhere sealed. But once we have done this, it will no longer make sense to say of the sample either that it is the colour sepia nor that it is not. And this is because the sample is an instrument of our *language*, which we use to make colour ascriptions to particular objects: "In this game, it is not something that is represented but is a means of representation" (PI, § 50). The reason for this is that Wittgenstein realised that the paradigm is a component of the *symbolism* and not of the corresponding objects to which it is applied. In the context of his example "in this room, there is something red", written with a red pen, Wittgenstein remarks:

This problem is connected with the fact that in an ostensive definition I do not state anything about the paradigm (sample); I only use it to make a statement. It belongs to the symbolism and is not one of the objects to which I apply the symbolism. (PG, 346)

To me, this remark seems crucial for the whole understanding of the concept of an ostensive definition, and it shows Wittgenstein's departure from his own Tractarian view about the relation between a name and an object.

In *Eine Philosophische Betrachtung*, Wittgenstein uses the example of *Nothing* to discuss his own misunderstanding of the name-object relation in the context of simples. He thereby admits that he had the erroneous idea that an object must correspond (*entsprechen*) to a name in order to have meaning, and that he had confused the *meaning of a name* with the *bearer of a name* (cf. EPB, 158). Wittgenstein picks up the sword example again in PI, § 39, and in PI, § 40 he remarks:

It is important to note that it is a solecism to use the word "meaning" to signify the thing that 'corresponds' to a word. That is to confound the meaning of a name with the *bearer* of the name. (PI, § 40)

In this context, Wittgenstein also admits that we often point to the object and say the name when we give an ostensive definition. Similarly, we may point to a thing and say 'this' and a name and the word 'this' would occupy the same position within a sentence. But still we get the impression that 'naming' is a kind of an 'occult' process:

Naming seems to be a *strange* connection of a word with an object. – And such a strange connection really obtains particularly when a philosopher tries to fathom the relation between name and what is named by staring at an object in front of him and repeat a name or even the word "this", innumerable times. (PI, § 38)

This remark seems to me quite similar to the idea of giving a name to my private experience by simply 'associating' the name with the sensation and using the name in a description, as Wittgenstein puts it in § 256. In his "Notes for a Philosophical Lecture" probably, from 1942, he readopts the picture of an occult act:

Meaning consisting of the word referring to an object.

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. [...]. The private object. The naming of the private object. The private lang[uage]. The game someone plays with himself. When do we call it a *game*? If it resembles a public game. The diary of Robinson Cr[usoe].

So we mustn't think that we understand the working of a word in language if we say it is a name which we give to some sort of pr[ivate] experience that 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 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.

The relation of ostensibly defining. That's to say, in order to establish a name relation we have to establish a technique of use. And we are misled if we think that it is a peculiar process of christening an object which makes a word the word for an object. This is a kind of superstition. 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. (NPL, 447-8)

Similarly in the case of a private language: in order for something to be a private language it must deserve the name 'private language', but not in virtue of it being private but in virtue of its similarities to *other languages*.

Rhees notes:

The confused idea that the meaning of the word "pain" (or "seeing") is what you would point to if you were *explaining* what it means. Whereas the pointing - the ostensive definition - is an explanation only if it makes you understand how to use the word in the rest of the language game (which may be complicated). (Rhees 15 April 1965, unpublished)

Similarly, in MS 116, Wittgenstein points out that it seems clear that "understanding the word" is one thing and "being able to apply the word" is another. This arises because we are accustomed to accepting the ostensive explanation as the final answer to the question "Do you understand the word...?" (MS 116, 144)

When Wittgenstein discusses the concept of an ostensive definition in PI, §§ 26-40, he points out that

an ostensive definition explains the use - the meaning - of a word if the role the word is supposed to play in the language is already clear. [...] One has already to know (or be able to do) something before one can ask what something is called. (§ 30)

Similarly, if someone shows me the king in chess and says: "This is called 'king'", this only tells me the use of the piece if I already know the rules of chess but not the shape of the king. The explanation that some figure is called 'king' can only tell me its use when its place in the game is already prepared. It can only work as a definition if I already know what a piece of chess is. Therefore, I can only ask what a particular piece is called if I already know what I can do with the name. In other words, I must already be able to master a language game in order to understand an ostensive definition in the first place. If, however, someone objects that all you really need is to know or to guess what the person who wants to give the definition is pointing to, I would answer that an ostensive definition could always be interpreted in different ways. But neither 'to mean' nor to 'interpret' the explanation in a particular way is an occurrence that accompanies the giving of an explanation and the hearing of it. Finally, I can say that a particular piece of the game is called 'king' but not the particular bit of material that I am pointing at (cf. §§ 31, 33-5).

These points are crucial for an understanding of the private language discussion: a ‘private’ ostensive definition will never work to fix a rule for the meaning of a ‘private object’. I am pointing to a piece of a game and not to a particular ‘private object’ when I give an ostensive explanation of something. Therefore, just before introducing the private diary case, Wittgenstein remarks:

When one says “He gave a name to his sensation” one forgets that much must be prepared in the language for mere naming to make sense. And when we speak of someone’s giving a name to pain, the grammar of the word “pain” is what has been prepared here; it indicates the post where the new word is stationed. (PI, § 257)

On 9 April 1954, Rhees notes:

It is impossible to *say* anything privately. (The only way an expression could mean anything privately would be by *confusing statements and definitions*. And then it does not matter what you say. There are no rules. If it does not make any difference what you say you say nothing. Since there are no rules, there is no language.) “Why can I not decide myself what following the definition is going to be?” When? Each time? If I make one decision – one ruling – once and for all, this only renews the problem: what is going to count as “following that ruling”?

“But I know from the public language how to follow a ruling”. That is no help in this sort of case (or it would be no help). (Ayer asks, “Why can I not be trusted?” because he thinks the private language refers to objects that could be spoken about publicly, if only other people could ‘see’ what I refer to and “follow the description”. This may underlie his query whether, if I am to understand a “descriptive statement” I must observe what it describes. This would be relevant if the issue were whether I can talk about private objects, in the sense in which no one else can observe. But if that were the issue, there would be no reason why I should not describe those objects in the language of communication and in terms that are used for “public” objects. Ayer takes the proposition that language must be public to mean that it must refer to public objects. That is not the point. The point is that it must be spoken by many people.) The question is whether the *language* can be private, not whether it can refer to a private object. If we do speak of a “private object” here, this is something different from “an object that only I can observe”. It should make as little sense to talk about anyone’s seeing this object as it would to talk about anyone’s feeling pain. Ayer seems to recognize as the chief of the points which he is disputing “that for a person to be able to attach meaning to a sign it is necessary that other people should be

capable of understanding it too". (And he evidently does not think secret codes are relevant here.) But in fact, he hardly discusses this question. He simply asks whether it is inconceivable that Crusoe should "name" many things upon the island, and then suggests that it is not self-contradictory that someone should have invented language. He then takes "naming" many things to be the same as "inventing words to describe" many things. And "his justification for describing his environment in the way that he does will be that he perceives it to have just those features which his words are intended to describe" (Ayer 1954, 71). This is all of it question begging.

Ayer seems to take "Sensation coupled with outward expression" to be something like "abscess coupled with swelling" (or "fracture coupled with swelling"). It is in that sense that he speaks of "private sensations" as sensations that just lack outward manifestation. He seems to think of talking about a sensation as though that were parallel with talking about an abscess.

The reasons why the accustomed - public - criteria for following a definition or following a rule cannot apply in the case of a "private" definition (which only I can understand): That sort of transference is possible in connection with secret languages, languages that another *could* understand. I know how such things are talked about. I know how such statements are taken. But not in the case of "what I can only say to myself". There is no sense in asking how this is taken. Nor is there sense in my deciding how I am going to use or follow the definition. This is not so much because it cannot really be a decision at all. Perhaps because *there is nothing to decide*. (Rhees 9 April 1954, unpublished. Last italics added)

Accordingly, about Ayer's semantic rules, Rhees notes:

Ayer's meaning rules could be understood by or followed by - another person. But apparently, this is not essential. If I recognize these rules, I recognize what they prescribe anyway. But I do not see what the sense of "rule" or "prescription" is here. I do not see how they prescribe or what authority they would have. And I do not see what decides whether I am following the rule or not. (This is really another way of saying that I do not see in what sense it is a rule.) (Rhees, undated)

Particularly in the case of sense data, the meaning of a word was supposed to be what is referred to. Then it seems what is referred to may actually not be the same for different persons, and therefore the meaning would also be different in each case. But the meaning of a

word is not constituted by the various things which it might “correctly refer”. So in the case of a colour concept, such as ‘red’, the meaning of ‘red’ is not all the various patches the word can correctly refer to. Rhees notes:

[T]his account of meaning makes the same confusion between giving a definition – giving meaning – and using a word in its meaning, as is made regarding names of physical objects like “stone”. (Rhees 30 June 1954, unpublished)

Later in the same typescript, Rhees continues:

Now the people who discuss private languages seem to think it would be the same kind of case when I am supposed to give names to something, which I can talk about only to myself. And the “can” there is a logical “can”: giving names to something of which it makes no sense to say that I could talk about them to anybody else, just as it makes no sense to say that another person could or could not feel my pains. (That raises difficulties about identity because one is inclined to speak of pains as objects, in certain contexts, and the question is whether he can feel what I feel. In one sense, of course, he can feel what I feel.) If I am supposed to talk about something to myself of which it makes no sense to say that I could talk about it to someone else, well then one has to insist again that it makes no sense to say that I could talk about it to myself either. And the whole business about whether one could remember is relevant for that. (Rhees 30 June 1954, unpublished)

Unless there *are* rules of a language, it is no use arguing that something is the same as it was two days ago. Similarly, in the case of sensations such as an itch, it appears as if one directly perceives what the itching is. Once the sensation is named, it seems as though the rules governing the subsequent use of that name are already determined by the sensation itself. But this impression is illusory. Even the feeling of itching gets its identity solely through a shared practice of expression, reaction, and language use (cf. Candlish 2019).

In “Can There be a Private Language?”, Rhees makes the same point in the case of colour concepts. If someone says, “This is the colour ‘red’”, she would give us a definition by showing us a particular sample, but:

Someone might say “I know what *I* mean by ‘red.’ It is what I experience when I look at this”. [...] I suppose the point would be that I know this independently of having learned the (public) language. If I know what I mean, in this way – if I know what colour I am referring to – then apparently I have done something like giving myself

a definition. But I must also have confused giving a definition and following a definition. It is this which allows me to evade the difficulty of what I am going to call 'following the definition'. Which is a real difficulty: what could it mean to say that I had followed the definition - 'my' definition - incorrectly? But if that has no sense, then what on earth is the point of the definition? And what does the definition *establish*? (Rhees 1954, 80-1)

A few pages later, Rhees again makes the point about confusing definitions with statements. He writes:

I cannot say anything unless I know the language. But I cannot know the language - any language - privately. I may have a secret code, but that is not the point here. It is a question of whether I can have a private understanding; whether I can understand something that *could* not be said in a language anyone else could understand. ("He may understand the language I speak, but he will not understand what I understand.") I say I cannot know a language privately, for what would there be to *know*? In language, it makes a difference what you say. But how can it make any difference what you say privately? (I do not mean talking to yourself.) It seems that in a private language, everything would have to be at once a statement and a definition. I suppose I may define a mark in any way I wish. And if every use of the mark is also a definition - if there is no way of discovering that I am wrong, in fact no sense in suggesting that I might be wrong - then it does not matter what mark I use or when I use it. (83)

I have extensively used Rhees' remarks to support the claim that in the case of private objects as the meanings of private sensation names, the ceremony of naming these sensations is a futile ceremony. We are not able to say what it would mean to follow the rule rightly or wrongly. Consequently, there is actually nothing to be followed. If a rule for the meaning of a word cannot be *established* in the first place, then the question of following a rule rightly or wrongly will not appear. We could not say anymore whether we are indeed following a rule or rather always *fixing* new meaning rules when we mistakenly assume we are using the rule. This problem is precisely due to the confusion between giving a sample and using a sample.

The extent to which the claim of private experiences is a grammatical rather than a psychological fiction is further illustrated by a passage from the "Notes for Lectures on 'Private Experience' and 'Sense Data'". Wittgenstein remarks:

The private experience is to serve as a paradigm, and at the same time admittedly it can't be a paradigm. The 'private experience' is a degenerate construction of our grammar (comparable in a



sense to tautology and contradiction). And this grammatical monster now fools us; when we wish to do away with it, it seems as though we denied the existence of an experience, say, toothache. (LPE, 314)

In his “Lectures on Description”, Wittgenstein makes a similar point, arguing against a behaviouristic reproach:

Nevertheless, it is entirely correct to say that in the description of a language-game, the mention of an experience as the justification of what he says does not enter. What I want to show is that this is not behaviourism, although it sounds like it. It is not behaviourism if one says that, in the description of a language-game, we don't use having a certain experience [as the justification] for his saying something. But we only use the circumstances, and, of course, here you see in a way the reasons why people say such things as “Experiences are private”. I might put it in such a way: nothing private enters the description of a language-game. You might say: “If nothing private enters the description of a language-game, that means there is nothing private, there are no experiences.” I'd say: “Not at all. It could enter it by saying ‘And then he sometimes says this’ instead of ‘whenever...’”, etc. I want to show you: it doesn't mean, “There are no experiences”, if they don't enter into the description of a language-game. (WCL, 158)

We find a similar remark in PI, § 304, when Wittgenstein again points out that a ‘nothing’ would just do the same job as a ‘something’ about which nothing could be said. Therefore, we have to give up the idea that language only functions in one particular way and that is to convey thoughts, may they be about objects, pains, or anything else (cf. PI, § 304). In “Lectures on Similarity”, Wittgenstein gives us a further explanation about sensations in such contexts:

When you say that I tend to talk behaviouristically, you forget that I am not talking about pain, but about the use of the word “pain”. If I was talking about pain I'd say, “I've got intolerable pain”. (a) I seem to talk about a certain phenomenon, (b) denying it existed. In a sense, ruling out something. How can I rule out anything? Suppose one of us had a rather intense pain. “Surely, you don't wish to tell me this is nothing. Surely, this is something.” Suppose you say this is something, you might seem to be quarrelling with me, whether it is something or nothing. But how are we to decide this? Either [this is a] routine [case], and I was saying, “You have no pain”. Or, I am saying you're using “there is something” in an inappropriate sense. Someone could be said to be a behaviourist by saying, “If you have pain, you've got nothing”, meaning

“got” is a very inappropriate word. If I said, “It is a very appropriate word”, then I would not be said to be a behaviourist. Only in one way could I wave something aside, and that is by saying it is an inappropriate word, etc. This is talking about the appropriateness of language. (WCL, 116-17)

It is for this reason that we can eliminate the private object (cf. RPP, I, §985), and even if some “private beetle boxes” of a community of people were empty, the word ‘beetle’ might still have a use, and we could ‘divide through’ the thing in the box, mathematically speaking (cf. PI, § 293. Cf. also PI, § 304; WCL, 94).

In his “‘Private Language’ and Wittgenstein’s Kind of Behaviourism”, C.W.K. Mundle shows precisely this kind of misunderstanding of paragraph § 293, first by raising a verificationist blame, and secondly by assuming that Wittgenstein is precisely denying the existence of experiences:

We have each learned to call “red” the shades we each see when we look at human blood, ripe tomatoes, etc.; and no one can verify that the shade he sees when he looks at a ripe tomato is the same as, or similar to, the shade seen by another when he looks at the same tomato. But Wittgenstein went too far when he said “the box might even be empty”, i.e. that for all I know the box of any other person might be empty, i.e. that for all I know other people may have no private experiences. (Mundle 1966, 44)

It is, of course, absurd to assume that Wittgenstein denies the existence of ‘private’ experiences in Mundle’s sense, as many of his remarks have already shown (what would ‘public’ experiences mean in this context?). Peter Geach, too, points out that Wittgenstein has often been accused of denying the existence of any mental acts and that his remarks about “private objects”, as, e.g., in PI, § 293, could actually be taken this way (Cf. Geach 1957, 3). But certainly, Wittgenstein would never have denied the fact that people do have a ‘private’ mental life in the sense that they might not tell anyone about their present mood or try to hide that they are in pain, etc. Moreover, we consult a doctor when suffering from a particular pain. In PI, § 256 Wittgenstein himself speaks of “the way in which we ordinarily refer to our feelings”, which obviously is a way of speaking about our feelings. Similarly, there is absolutely no reason

why I should not give an account of something which only I can see. Or of something which only I can feel: as when I tell a doctor what I feel in my abdomen. He does not feel my sensations (if that means anything), but he knows what I am talking about; he knows what sensations they are. (Rhees 1954, 84)

Wittgenstein himself points out:

*How do I use words to signify my sensations? – As we ordinarily do? Then are my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensation? In that case, my language is not a ‘private’ one. Someone else might understand it as well as I. – (PI, § 256)*

One crucial point here is that Wittgenstein does not deny a conceivable private reference of a psychological expression, in the sense that it denotes a kind of experience that could be characterised as ‘private’. For some reason, I may not want to tell anybody about it; I may try to hide any behavioural expressions, etc. What he does deny is the possibility of giving such linguistic signs a private meaning by means of private ostensive definition. To that extent, the assumption of private objects proves irrelevant, and in this sense “a Nothing would render the same service as a Something about which nothing could be said” (PI, § 304). Wittgenstein introduces a similar picture to the beetle box in PI, § 271: a person who is unable to remember what the word ‘pain’ means and therefore constantly calls something else by the word but does nevertheless use ‘pain’ as we all do with the usual symptoms and presuppositions of having pain (cf. PI, § 271). This again shows that the assumptions of a private object and a private meaning are idling wheels.

One way of interpreting the empty box case introduced in PI, § 293 might be Malcolm’s introduction of a person, also called Robinson, who has never experienced any pain but has still been able to gain an understanding of what it means for other persons to be in pain. Hence, we could imagine, without implying any contradiction, that even in his own case, Robinson might meaningfully say that he is not feeling pain when the doctor pricks him with a needle (For a discussion of Malcolm’s example, see Munz 2023, 198-200).

In the final section of this chapter, I will basically just quote some of Rhees’ replies to Ayer’s Crusoe in some of his letters. In these remarks, he makes a point, which I think is crucial for the understanding of an essentially private language and which has not yet been discussed in greater detail, at least as far as I know. The point will be that even observations of regularity and similar behaviour to ours might not be sufficient to judge whether the person observed does indeed *use* a language, because *interpreting* a language is different from *understanding* a language. In other words, to interpret a particular pattern as a language from *our* point of view as language users does not necessarily imply that the inventor of a particular pattern herself has introduced it as a system of rules for possible language *use*.

### 2.3 Robinson Crusoe and the Wallpaper Pattern

In his symposium paper, Ayer gives us a description of his Robinson Crusoe that first seems to remind one of the harmless cases Wittgenstein himself introduces in his manuscripts. But then it turns out to be one that was introduced to defend a private language in the strong sense: A Robinson Crusoe is abandoned on an island as an infant, never having learned to speak. Like Romulus and Remus, he is nurtured by a wolf or another animal until he becomes self-sufficient and reaches adulthood. In adapting his behaviour to various features on the island, he would undoubtedly be able to recognise many things. And Ayer asks whether it were unthinkable that he might also assign names to these things? There could, of course, be psychological reasons to question whether such a solitary individual would actually create a language. It may be argued that the development of language is a social phenomenon. It does not, however, seem to be inherently contradictory to consider that someone untrained in the use of any existing language could still invent a language for himself. And if we allow that Crusoe could make up a language and invent words to describe his surroundings, why should we not also allow that he could invent words in order to describe his sensations? (Cf. Ayer 1954, 70.) In the previously quoted letter to Ayer, Rhees writes:

If you should ask “Might there not be a language that could be understood by various people, even though some of its words are names of objects that only one person can observe?”, then I think I should say yes, and I think Wittgenstein would. But I do not know that we should have agreed on anything very important.

After the already quoted passages (see above pp. 206-7), Rhees continues:

It seems to me that one important difference between your view and mine lies in the notion of “giving names to things” or in “using a name to refer to something”. I may have read you wrongly, but you seem to me sometimes to hold that the meaning of an expression is what it refers to or what it indicates. (Cf. PI, § 264: “Wenn du einmal weißt, was das Wort bezeichnet, verstehst du es, kennst seine ganze Anwendung” [Quotes are in the original and are of course essential]). And you seem to hold that you can tell whether you are using a word in the same way by seeing whether you are using it to refer to the same thing. That would seem to make “referring to the same thing” in a way prior to “using the word in the same way” or “in the same meaning”. And that it certainly something I should dispute, and I think Wittgenstein would. I do not think that a word can be said to “refer to” anything at all except

in connection with a rule, except where there is a difference between the right use and a misuse of the word. One might even say, as used to be said, that it refers to something in virtue of what it means, but then what it means is not what it refers to.

Another important difference – or at any rate a difficulty – for our discussion is connected with the notion of “privately”. Wittgenstein would agree that there is a certain sense in which you might say “sensations are private”, although then this is a grammatical proposition, like “patience is something you play by yourself” [cf. PI, § 248]. But he would not ever hold that they are private *objects*. In most contexts, it would be misleading to speak of them as objects at all.

May I call attention to one place where I think you have misunderstood him. You speak, for instance, on page 76, of “something that is naturally associated with what it describes, in the way that feelings are associated with their ‘natural expressions’”, and it looks as though you thought that were a way in which Wittgenstein might have spoken. But he does not say that a feeling or a sensation is *associated* with its natural expression. He says (256) „Sind also meine Empfindungsworte mit meinen natürlichen Empfindungsäußerungen verknüpft?“ [“Then are my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensation?”] Is *the meaning of the words* bound up with the expression of the sensations? He would not have held that the sensation was something that could be associated with an expression, as a disorder of the liver might be associated with a discolouring of the eye, for instance. The natural expression of the sensation is in no way a *symptom* of the sensation. There is not the expression plus the sensation. And when I see another person in pain, I am not indirectly aware of his sensation, as a doctor may be indirectly aware of the condition of my liver. As I say, this goes together with the fact that sensations are not objects, nor processes either. This is important on its own account – this matter about sensations – and it is important because something very analogous holds of understanding and of meaning what you say. “Understanding is private” has much in common with the discussion of “sensations are private”. And this brings us back to the distinction between following a rule and interpreting a rule again. (Rhees 1954, unpublished)

This is why Wittgenstein argues that we learn the meanings of sensation names by learning new pain-behaviour. A word such as ‘pain’ is connected with a primitive and natural expression such as ‘ouch’ and used in its place. This does, of course, not mean that the word ‘pain’ just *means* ‘ouch’; on the contrary, it *replaces* the cry. Therefore, “I

am in pain" is not a *description* of my inner state but instead takes over the role of a primitive reaction, such as a cry. Or how could we try to interpose between the pain and its natural expression (cf. PI, §§ 244-5)? To take the natural expression as a *symptom* for someone having a particular sensation does, however, erroneously open the door for the possibility of private objects and the discussion of pain with and pain without behaviour, which Wittgenstein picks up in PI, § 304 and elsewhere.

In his reply to Ayer, Rhees tries to show the internal relation between referring to something and understanding something. If my words are to refer to anything at all, they must be understood. In other words, reference only works in connection with a particular use which one learns when one learns what the expression means. Words cannot refer to anything without a manner in which the language is employed. This is why there cannot be a private understanding. If what is said does not make any difference, then nothing is understood. Certainly, there is no inherent reason why I should not be able to give an account of something visible only to me or something only I can feel, such as when I describe a particular unpleasant sensation to a doctor. The doctor does, of course, not experience my sensations, but he understands what I am talking about; he comprehends the nature of those sensations. Now, Ayer asks, why Crusoe should not be able to also devise names for his sensations? I can, of course, invent a name for a sensation, but this is because I speak a public language that already contains names for sensations. This is why I know what a name for a sensation is. In other words, to invent a name or to give a name to something belongs to the language as we already speak it (cf. Rhees 1954, 84-5). It is not that someone could just invent a particular language because language is internally connected with a particular way of living. Rhees remarks:

A man might invent marks to go with various objects. That is not language. And when Ayer's Crusoe invents *names* to *describe* flora and fauna, he is taking over more than he has invented. He is supposed to keep a diary, too. Ayer thinks that if he could do that when Friday was present he could surely have done it when he was still alone. But what would that be – keeping a diary? Not just making marks on paper, I suppose (or on a stone or what it might be). You might ask "Well, what is it when I do it? And why should it not be the same for him, only a bit more primitive?" But it cannot be that. My marks are either marks I use in communication with other people, or they stand for expressions I use with other people. (87)

But what difference would it make, and why cannot Crusoe use his marks in the same way I do? It is because I can use them in their various meanings, something Crusoe is not able to do. Rhees notes:

There seems to be nothing logically absurd in supposing that he behaves just as I do. To a large extent I agree. But it is absurd to suppose that the marks he uses mean anything; even if we might want to say that he goes through all the motions of meaning something by them. (88)

Therefore, if I am supposed to be saying anything at all, this must take place in some language: "If there were no more than my behaviour, the marks I make and so on, then I should not mean anything either" (88). Ayer's depiction of Crusoe suggests that he might use marks for specific purposes, such as indicating the location of hidden items. He could do this with as much regularity as we can imagine. However, this is not what is meant by the regular use of an expression in a particular language. If Crusoe were to suddenly employ these marks in a completely different way, it would not make sense to claim that he had done something wrong or inconsistent with his prior actions. We could not say he used them with the same or with a different meaning. Even if he consistently used them for the same purpose, as he might always gather her wood for the same purpose, this does not capture what we mean by 'using an expression in the same way'. Using an expression in the same way is not the same as using it for the same purpose. Moreover, any discrepancy between what I say at one time and what I say at another does not imply that my actions with a mark or sound at one time are different from what I did before. If I have consistently done the same thing with the mark, there is no implication of a language rule, in that following a particular rule or word must always allow the possibility of misunderstanding it or making a mistake. Rhees notes:

Ayer's Crusoe may make the kind of mistakes animals do. He may mistake a bird which he does not like to eat for one which he likes. This is not like a mistake in understanding the meaning of an expression or a mistake in following what was said. "Why not? He calls the edible bird 'ba', and when he sees the inedible one he says 'ba' and kills it." That is not a mistake in following the meanings of words. He could have made the same mistake without using words at all. (92)

I will finish this section by quoting from a few more letters, two of them to John Wisdom, already quoted, and one to Elisabeth Anscombe, which will make Rhees' point still clearer.

In a letter to Wisdom, dated 15 July 1954, Rhees expresses his difficulty in saying that a man who had never known society might speak a language, and what is the difference between saying something and just making marks or sounds, which is closely connected with the general relation between language and things. He writes:

The speakers [during the symposium 1954] told me all the things Crusoe might do. But I do not think it really matters what he could do. I said that the question of whether he could speak a language is something an experiment could not decide. If someone ever does come across a man who has grown and lived as Ayer supposed Crusoe did, it will not make our question any easier to answer. The question is whether such a man could speak a language. And we cannot answer this by watching what he does. Meaning goes hand in hand with following a rule. And that is connected with the fact that, as a rule, expressions are taken in these and these ways. That is what makes the difference between saying something and just making a sound or a mark. I cannot find that Ayer discusses this, and the meeting did not.

Making drawings of birds and so on – even if you call them “charts” – that brings me no nearer to speaking if I have nothing to which I can appeal to know if I have followed them correctly or not.

If there is no way of telling whether he has followed the drawings correctly – then it does not make sense to ask. “But he might make all the signs of having made a mistake.” But if that is all there is to it, then if he does not make the “signs of dissatisfaction”, if he remains serenely convinced that it is all right – then it is all right. The only criterion of having gone wrong is that he *thinks* it is wrong and feels dissatisfied.

On this basis, there could be no such thing as intelligibility. Nor any such thing as trying to understand what he means or what he is saying. He is not saying anything. That is why I say it does not matter *what* you see him doing. Unless there is some rule to which he can appeal, he is not speaking and he is not writing. To say that he could *give himself* a rule by drawing so and so is no help – just because there would still be no difference between his being sure that he was following the rule and his following the rule. I said that although Ayer’s Crusoe might conceivably use the same marks and sounds as I do, he could not use them in their various meanings. [...] If you should ask, “If you find someone doing all these things, would you not be inclined to say he had a language?”, well, of course, I should. But then I should think (and so would you) that he had at some time known human society. If we were assured that he had not, I should find his behaviour remarkable. But I should not think he was using marks and sounds as expressions used in a language. (Rhees, unpublished)

In a subsequent letter to Wisdom, dated 8 August 1954, Rhees writes:



Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* was not directly concerned with the case of the congenitally solitary man. I heard him refer to that sort of case only once, and then he did not go into it fully. He said, as I remember, that if you found a man making noises like that, which seemed to be regularly connected with what he was doing, then you might feel some doubt about what to call it – it would clearly have certain analogies with language. He mentioned it when he was discussing the foundations of mathematics. And I never heard him return to this.

The emphasis, if I may repeat, should be on the question of how words mean, or on what “saying something” is, and not primarily on the question of how words refer to sensations, for instance.

I think there must also be a difference between 1) following a rule and 2) doing just what someone would do if he were following a rule.

I do not think that he would be following the rule unless it were conceivable that he should go contrary to it, and I do not think you could say of anyone that he had gone contrary to the rule unless you might conceivably bring him to see that he had done so. Understanding a game is not like understanding a mechanism.

Suppose a man had never done a calculation in his life and had never been taught what a calculation was, and one day he suddenly wrote down a calculation in arithmetic. I do not think we would say he was calculating, or that he was following the rules of arithmetic.

A rule of calculation *cannot* be something that is followed only once. He cannot follow a rule just once in his life.

I want to say that if he has never *learned* to follow a rule, then whatever he does he will not be following a rule. If he has never learned to calculate, then whatever he does he will not be calculating. [...] (That is why I wanted to insist against Ayer that following a rule is entirely different from following a habit.) [...] If a man speaks to himself, he speaks in some language, and a language is spoken by others. Otherwise, he would not be saying anything to himself. May I repeat: I do not say that a man cannot speak a language unless he speaks it with others. I say he cannot speak a language unless it is spoken by others. And I would add also: he has learned it. (Rhees, unpublished)

Finally, I will quote a few remarks Rhees wrote to Elisabeth Anscombe on 25 July 1954, where he gives a better understanding of

what he means by the metaphor of a ‘wallpaper pattern’, which he uses in his reply to Ayer. Looking back to the notes I took during our discussions in spring 1989, just a few months before his death, Rhees still talked about the picture of a wallpaper pattern when arguing that some philosophers make philosophy look like a piece of wallpaper with its pattern and without any *perplexities*. It must have been an important picture for him.

In his letter to Anscombe, Rhees writes:

You might find some rule of translation that would give you a series of mathematical propositions and even proofs. Put the other way about, this would mean that we could express mathematical proofs in the designs of a wallpaper pattern. But this would not show that those who designed the wall were calculating and proving things in mathematics when they were doing it. It would not show that the marks on the wallpaper were mathematical expressions at all. They would become so when we used them as such; but not before. [...] I might put this by saying that since the wallpaper designs do not play the role of mathematics, they are not mathematics. And they would not be that even if they happened to be the same as the marks which we might write on a sheet of paper in doing a calculation. The fact that they may be used by us in doing mathematics does not show that those who made them were doing mathematics.

In the case of the marks and noises, a solitary man might make, Rhees remarks:

The fact that we could find some rule of transformation that would turn these marks and sounds into sensible expressions would not show that those marks and noises played the role of language there at all. What does it mean to understand what is being said or to understand the language that is being spoken? And I said that this does not mean just that you can interpret or transform the marks and sounds that are made into the expressions of language which you understand. [...] Understanding what is said is not interpreting what is said. [...] Understanding the language means knowing the language. [...] Knowing what it means is not interpreting. It is knowing a rule (following a rule) and that is following a practice. [...] Anyway, the fact that you can “interpret” what he utters to make it correspond to the expressions of some language will not show that he is saying anything in any language himself. And it will not show that his utterance is capable of being understood. [...] You might complain here that I have made an inexcusable jump. I suggested that if he says anything, he must say it in some language that he has spoken. And now I am suggesting that if he

has not known human society he cannot be saying anything. [...] A machine would not be saying anything even if it made sounds that were the sounds of the English language and which came in the form of intelligible English sentences (or made marks, which were letters of the English alphabet, etc.) Let it be logically possible that such a machine should be produced by natural causes. It would not be saying anything more than your tape recorder says anything. And no more would Ayer's Crusoe, if he happened to utter what we should recognize as an English sentence. Whether it plays the role of a language: that does not depend on whether you can interpret the marks and sounds as the expressions of a language. It is not that question at all.

All these remarks point to a problem whose importance has, in my view, not yet been appreciated. The distinction between the *harmless* and the *strong* cases of a private language is not easy to draw, and even if it were, it would still be a very thin line. In addition, as we already know, context is a very complicated thing and the answer can never be categorical. (cf. WCL, 239, 168)

### 3 Subjective Knowledge and the Private Chart Inspector

In PI, § 246, Wittgenstein raises the question of the sense in which sensations might be private and offers an initial answer, stating: "Well, only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it". His immediate response to this is that "in one way this is wrong, and in another, nonsense" (PI, § 246). There are cases where we do know that another person is in pain. For example, if we observe someone being knocked down by a car, crying out, squirming, and asking for a doctor, we would immediately recognise that the person is in severe pain. One might choose to say, "I believe he is in pain" instead of "He is in pain", but that's about it. What seems like an explanation here is essentially an exchange of one expression for another, of which the former seems more appropriate. However, Wittgenstein emphasises: "Just try - in a real case - to doubt someone else's fear or pain!" (PI, § 303). While there is a possibility of being wrong, such as when a person is acting in a film or pretending to be in pain, it does not imply that we could *never* know whether another person is in pain.

Wittgenstein's criticism of sentences like: "Only I can know whether I am really in pain" is tied to the grammar of the word 'to know', which must always allow for the possibility of being mistaken about what one assumes to know. This relates to the use of the expression "I only thought I knew but I did not". When we take the word 'know' to be describing a particular state of mind, we tend to eliminate the

expression “I thought I knew” because we believe it is simply wrong. After all, we cannot know what did not happen. We want to reserve the term ‘to know’ for situations where we cannot be wrong, such as when talking about our impressions or ‘sense-data’ (cf. WCL, 37, 43). If the word ‘to know’ describes a state of affairs meant to guarantee what is known, then we forget the use of the expression “I thought I knew” (cf. OC § 12). Whereas I can say that I thought I knew the capital of Austria but indeed I did not, it does not make sense to say that I thought I knew that I was in pain, but in fact I did not. The grammar of ‘to know’ must always allow the possibility of being wrong.

Similarly, in the case of another person, if one says: “I know only indirectly what she sees, but directly what I see”, this conveys a misleading picture. The example of the matchbox is employed to illustrate this:

I can't be said to know that I have toothache if I can't be said not to know that I have toothache. I can't be said to know indirectly what the other has if I can't be said to know it directly. The misleading picture is this: I see my own matchbox but I know only from hearsay what his looks like. We can't say: 'I say he has toothache because I observe his behaviour, but I say that I have because I feel it'. (LPE, 319)

This picture is already familiar from PI, § 293, where Wittgenstein asks if one who maintains that she knows what the word ‘pain’ means only from her own case, must not also admit that this holds for other people too? Everyone would claim they know what pain is *only* from their own case, leading to the strong case of understanding experiences as *private*.

Wittgenstein now extends this discussion of knowing one's own private sensations to the far more interesting case of colour concepts:

The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own specimen, but that nobody knows whether other people also have *this* or something else. The assumption would thus be possible – though unverifiable – that one section of mankind had one visual impression of red and another section another. (PI, § 272)

The discussion then explores whether one could never know whether another person sees the same colour, even though they use the colour concept in the ordinary way. Thomas Nagel frames it as follows:

How do you know that red things don't look to your friend the way yellow things look to you? Of course, if you ask him how a fire

engine looks, he'll say it looks red, like blood, and not yellow, like a dandelion; but that's because he, like you, uses the word "red" for the colour that blood and fire engines look to him, whatever it is. Maybe it's what you call yellow, or what you call blue, or maybe it's a colour experience you've never had and can't even imagine. (Nagel 1987, 21)

Rhees remarks:

The idea that "there is a limit to what we can communicate". Or perhaps: "I can never know whether the content which you put into my words is the content which they had for me" - and so on. This is connected with such questions as: "Can I ever know whether anyone else sees the same colours as I do?"; and also with: "Can I ever know whether another person has the feelings or sensations which I have? Or even: whether he can *really* know *what* feelings or sensations I have. Obviously *I* know what feelings I have - but you can't really know this (although you may form conjectures and analogies) because to *really* know what they are, what they feel like, you'd have to *feel* them". Of course you do not think along these lines when you are telling the doctor how you feel. And this is what Wittgenstein emphasized over and over again. But people often get caught in this way of thinking when they are trying to give an account of the language. And in particular here: when they are trying to give an account of the language in which we express feelings and talk about feelings. [...] My point is that Ayer's reference to "my own capacity to recognize my experiences" does nothing to give sense to the talk of "private experiences" which Wittgenstein was considering in that passage [PI, §258]. [...] He [Ayer] has not begun to think about the difficulties in the notion of *giving a name* to something; the distinction between giving a name and using a name; the notion of telling myself (informing myself?) what experiences I am having - in a sense of "telling" in which I cannot tell anyone else; etc., etc. (Rhees, letter to Mundle, 3 April 1965)

Here again, Rhees points out the confusion between defining or giving a name to an object and using the name to make a statement. One reason someone might defend such a position seems to rest on the fact that we cannot compare our immediate impressions with those of other people, and that we do not have immediate access to other people's minds. We could not have a method of comparison in such a context. In the above remark § 272, Wittgenstein himself emphasises that the claim that one part of a society had one impression of red and another part another impression would not be verifiable. But then, in the "Lectures on Similarity", he introduces the splendid thought experiment of a mind inspector who is able to check the

assumed private charts of some people who were asked to make coloured marks on a blackboard. Wittgenstein starts by asking about the idea of a 'private regularity', which someone does not convey. Let us imagine a person having a piece of paper before her, which she does not show to anyone else. Or we might imagine her head as a box, and her being able to look inside it. This would be the image of a 'private picture'. Let us further assume that we all have such a private picture before us. Looking at what she does would then just be second best to showing us what she 'really' sees:

Suppose I say, "Let's compare your private picture and my private picture". This, so far, makes no sense, unless we tell what we mean by it, what our method of comparing is. [...] Suppose that to draw on the blackboard with crayons - white, blue, etc. - each person has a private colour chart. [Two examples of a chart follow.] Each looks up the colour from the chart. The assumption is that I don't know what is on your colour chart. The colours on the chart may have changed. You look the colours up and point according to my orders - "Blue! Red!", etc. One day, someone comes in and inspects. Your red patch has changed to green, etc., or all your patches are grey. But you look the colours up from your chart and draw them or point to them correctly. Are we to say that the word "green" means something different to you than what it means to us, or are we to say that it means the same? We don't know here what "using the chart" means. Your chart now has nothing in common with an ordinary chart at all. (WCL, 94. Cf. also PI, § 275)

Thus, it is possible to imagine the case of correctly identifying a colour and following an order in spite of constantly changing private colour charts. Accurate reference can therefore not be based on the use of one's own subjective colour chart. We would not know what "using my private colour charts" *could* mean in such a case. And this precisely shows that the question of private charts is not something that is possible though not verifiable because Wittgenstein himself just turns it into an imaginary case of verification. To me, this just seems like passing the buck back. And I guess this would also mean that, according to Ayer, the persons inspected were making *mistakes* when they were following the order to choose a coloured crayon, like Crusoe, who shot the wrong animal 'ba'. But it is obvious that the problem is not one of being right or wrong in applying my private charts, but that the application of such a private chart would not make any sense:

Looking up a table in the imagination is no more looking up a table than the image of the result of an imagined experiment is the result of an experiment. (PI, § 265)

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If one were to object that this experiment does not apply because it is impossible in principle to examine private colour charts of different subjects, then one can only *assert* the possibility of strictly private contents of consciousness without any justification, except with the argument of logical freedom from contradiction. This is why I think this thought experiment is so important, because it simply makes use of the other side of the ‘nonsensical coin’, so to speak. Of course, so far, it makes no sense to assume that I could look into another person’s box. But it is as nonsensical to assume that our private charts would constantly change while we use the relevant concepts as we all do in our ordinary language, as it is to assume that each of us would have their own colour impressions and corresponding private tables as a justification for knowing the meaning of a sensation word or a colour concept. Therefore, I think both thought experiments, Nagel’s person who could not ‘really’ tell us what she sees, and Wittgenstein’s mind inspector, would be idling wheels. This is what I take “making unobvious nonsense obvious” to mean. Interestingly enough, Ayer himself seems to allow the conceivability of looking into someone else’s soul. He writes:

It is not even necessary to make the assumption that Man Friday comes to know what Crusoe’s sensations are and so to understand the words which signify them through having similar sensations of his own. It is conceivable that he should satisfy all the tests, which go to show that he has this knowledge, and indeed that he should actually have it, even though the experience which he rightly ascribes to Crusoe is unlike any that he has or ever has had himself. It would indeed be very strange if someone had this power of seeing, as it were, directly into another’s soul. But it is strange only in the sense that it is something which, on causal grounds, we should not expect to happen. The idea of its happening breaks no logical rule. (Rhees 1954, 74)

It would be interesting to know what Ayer means by “breaking no logical rule”. Furthermore, shall we assume that those with the permanently changing private colour charts would *know* that their private samples are constantly changing? Would they be aware of the fact that, according to Ayer, they are continually making *mistakes*? Would some of them be surprised and consult an eye doctor? Would some of them answer that sometimes they have very strange visual experiences, tomatoes in the supermarket suddenly looking blue and bananas red? Would some of them question the inspector and insist that whenever they picked up the green crayon, they used their private green sample because “Only I can know what colour chart I have”? Would some of them be Russellians and say that they know the colour perfectly and completely when they see it, and that no further

knowledge of the colour itself is possible, even theoretically (cf. Russell 1956, 202)? Or would some of them say that they know what colours their charts have, only that they cannot tell us, like Nagel's example or Wittgenstein's private diarist who only makes scratches?

Even John Locke, who has often been quoted as a pioneer for the possibility of a private language, introduces a case of colour inversion and points out that such an assumption is of very little use. He argues that even in situations where an object elicits different ideas in different individuals, perhaps due to differing structures of their organs, there is no attribution of falsehood regarding their ideas. And one might add, "and no attribution of truth, either". Locke uses the example of a violet, which causes an idea in person A, corresponding to that of a marigold in person B, and vice versa. However, the possibility of this occurring would never be discernible, as the consciousness of person A could not penetrate the body of person B to perceive the appearance generated by B's organs (cf. Locke 2011, II: xxxii, 15, 389). Locke draws the conclusion that, in such cases, neither the ideas nor their corresponding names are confused. In situations where both individuals perceive a violet, they both use the term "blue" and are capable of making corresponding colour distinctions:

For all Things, that had the Texture of a Violet, producing constantly the Idea, that he called Blue; and those which had the Texture of a Marigold, producing constantly the Idea, which he as constantly called Yellow, whatever those Appearances were in his Mind; he would be able as regularly to distinguish Things for his Use by those Appearances, and understand, and signify those distinctions, marked by the Names Blue and Yellow, as if the Appearances, or Ideas in his Mind, received from those two Flowers, were exactly the same, with the Ideas in other Men's Minds. (Locke 2011, II: xxxii, 15, 389)

Certainly, it is undisputed that there can be situations in which, for example, normal conditions such as lighting, visual ability etc. are not met, leading to potential perceptual discrepancies. Philosophically relevant here is the seemingly innocuous transition from such a specific situation, where the described deviations exist and are usually diagnosed, e.g., colour blindness, to the general cases where these differences are not supposed to be detectable. Wittgenstein again provides us with a thought experiment that initially describes the possibility of an intrapersonal inverse spectrum, as he notes:

Consider this case: someone says "I can't understand it, I see everything red blue today and vice versa". We answer "it must look queer!" He says it does and, e.g., goes on to say how cold the glowing coal looks and how warm the clear (blue) sky. I think we should



under these or similar circumstances be inclined to say that he saw red what we saw blue. And again we should say that we know that he means by the words 'blue' and 'red' what we do as he has always used them as we do. (LPE, 284)

This would again be the philosophically harmless case in which a person experiences perceptual contents that deviate from others, based on the same extramental objects, such as the blue sky and a glowing piece of coal. However, from the example it becomes clear that this colour inversion has no impact on the meaning of the terms 'red' and 'blue', as the person undergoing the inversion uses the terms in accordance with our usage. We perceive the glowing coal as red and the sky as blue. The situation is different, however, in the following case, as Wittgenstein continues:

On the other hand: Someone tells us today that yesterday he always saw everything red blue, and v[ice] v[ersa]. We say: But you called the glowing coal red, you know, and the sky blue. He answers: That was because I had also changed the names. We say: But didn't it feel very queer? and he says: No, it seemed all perfectly ordinary /natural/. Would we in this case too say: ...? (LPE, 284)

The answer seems clear because we would not know on what grounds we could say that the person was using the terms 'blue' and 'red' in the same way as we do. Deviating perceptions, such as seeing violets and marigolds, can, according to Locke, be neglected:

I am nevertheless very apt to think, that the sensible Ideas produced by any Object in different Men's Minds are most commonly pretty near and undiscernably alike. For which Opinion, I think, are many Reasons offered: but that being besides my present Business, I shall not trouble my Reader with them; but only mind him, that the contrary Supposition, if it could be proved, is of little use, either for the Improvement of our Knowledge or Conveniency of Life; and so we needn't trouble ourselves to examine it. (Locke 2011, II: xxxii, 15, 389)

So even Locke, who constantly argues that all our ideas are within our own breasts, hidden and invisible to others (cf. III, ii, 1, 405), labels such assumptions as quite useless. Similarly, when I look at the sky and say: "What a wonderful blue sky!", I point to the sky, not into myself. I do not assume that the colour impression only belongs to me, and I do not hesitate to also tell others (cf. PI, § 275).

In "Lectures on Similarity", Wittgenstein provides another private chart example, similar to the private colour charts and to PI, § 271:

Suppose, when we play chess, we each have a private chess board on which we make moves before we make moves on the public board. Suppose someone plays chess all right, but makes moves on his private board in a completely haphazard way, but with all the appearances of setting great value on his moves on the private board, etc.). Malcolm and I (before using our private chart) both learnt the words “green”, “blue”, etc. How did we learn to use the table on our charts? – We learnt the private chart by learning the public chart. The private game may be any damn thing, as it is only judged by giving rise to the game of chess which we publicly play. (WCL, 95)

All these examples show that there is nothing wrong per se with the picture of a private chart if we can make some *use* of it. Being able to speak a common language also allows for the possibility of private charts, because we have already learned how to use colour concepts, sensation words, public charts, etc. Otherwise, the private chart could be “any damned thing” because it does not belong to the game. “The impression of a ‘private table’ in the game arises through the absence of a table and through the similarity of the game to one that is played with a table.” (Z, § 552)

In “Lectures on Description” from Lent term 1940, Wittgenstein gets back to the example of a private chart and draws a parallel with the role of experiences:

I gave the example of a game played publicly, in which each of the players had a table which he didn’t show to anyone. I can send a man to fetch things of various colours, and it is obvious that this game could be played by means of a colour chart, in which he looks up, goes to patch, etc. The point is: suppose this were done, but suppose that then, somehow or other, the charts which each man had were changed, so that green stood for red, etc., and suppose that, nevertheless, the man went on as before and fetched the right thing, etc. What if they were all grey [all the colours on his chart] – if you looked at what he was doing? The point is that in this case we could not say that “looking up” entered the game. He did something, but it obeyed no rules, and, then, indeed played a game independently. We would not say in this case that what he did depended on what he saw in the table. In the way this chart enters, this is the way experiences enter. We would say the chart is no justification, and in fact plays no role in the game. If we talk of the image of so and so, I was saying this image does not come in as a picture. The expressions of experience come in just like those expressions which the man uses looking at the private table. That is, there is a peculiarity in this language-game, which is that it ends somewhere. It goes on, up to a point, as though there was

a table. You actually could, as it were, supply a hypothetical table, although, as a matter of fact, there isn't one. (WCL, 161)

At the end of this chapter on 'subjective' knowledge, I would like to quote from a Rhees manuscript dated 17 April 1965. The remarks quoted here are closely connected with his reply to Ayer and his letter to Mundle, written just two weeks before. And here again, Rhees points out the difference between *giving a definition* and *using a definition*:

If "I can't be mistaken about what colour I see" is taken to be more than a grammatical statement, then - since the difference in grammar between "I see red" and "he sees red" is (apparently) sharp and constant - someone might go on to suppose that *because* it always has sense to say "perhaps he doesn't see red", I can never *really know* that he does. And if you emphasize the "*never really know...*", it may seem as though it would have sense to say: "Perhaps nobody ever sees the colours I see. I can know only indirectly what he *does* see - by what he says, for instance. All I know is that he says he sees red. But even if I am convinced he is not lying, this does not really tell me what he *does* see. For I cannot know that he uses the word 'red' for the same colour as I do". "He sees the same colour as I see." What is it that I am saying perhaps he doesn't do? For it sounds almost as though I were prevented from making the comparison that would assure me one way or the other. [...] But 1) such a comparison - a "direct" comparison of what I see and what he sees cannot even be imagined. And 2) it is not the case that the visual impression I am having (when I look at my red curtain) *tells* me what colour I'm seeing, and that *therefore* I can't be mistaken when I say it is red. Compare the suggestion that children know what colours they see before they learn to speak. I do not say they don't. For I should not understand the denial any more than I understand the statement itself. It takes the expression "know what colour he sees" out of the game in which we use it: in which we know what it has sense to ask, what would be reasons for doubting it, what would be conclusions from it, and so on. Similarly with "I remember my experiences before I was born". My impression does not *tell* me anything at all, and certainly not whether the word I have used is the right one to describe it. How can you know whether it is red - or *that* it is red - unless you know what "red" means? You do not learn what "red" means (nor "colour" either) by looking at a red surface. It seems to tell you what colour it is, in the sense in which a sample may tell you what colour it is. But a sample only does this with a recognized application. (It would not do to take as a sample warm, cold, or tepid). But the delusion of "I know what colour

I'm seeing" is the delusion of taking what you see as a sample of itself: as though you could use it to describe itself. We might say you confuse giving a definition and using the word in accordance with a definition. And unless you *distinguish* these, it has no sense to speak of a definition at all. (This is relevant to "giving names to my sensations.") If I thought that nobody meant by "red" what I do, the word would have lost its point. There would be no point in my using the word - and the phrase "mean by it what I do" would be empty as well. The suggestion that "it would have sense to say that nobody sees the same colours as I do - or that nobody means by colour words what I mean by them" turns out to be false. It is not logically possible. [...] what looked like a "logically possible" suggestion turns out again to be meaningless.

In his reply to Ayer, Rhees perfectly sums up the central points of the issue. If words did not have a regular use, I would not know that something is, e.g., red, I would not know that the private colour chart was constantly changing, etc., because there would simply be *nothing to know*.

Because there is this agreement, it is possible to say something. When I tell you that the patch on the patient's skin is red, I am not saying that it is called red, but that it is red. But I could mean nothing definite by that, and you could not understand me unless people who have learned the words as we have would agree in calling this red. If people could not be brought to use the word in any regular way, if one man who had been taught as we have should go on to give the name to what we should call the complementary colour, if another used it as we do on Monday but in a different way on Tuesday, and if others did not show even these degrees of regularity - then it would not mean anything to say that someone had used the word mistakenly. There would be no distinction between mistakenly and correctly. And there would be no distinction between saying that it is red and saying anything else. It is not a statement about what I do or about what people generally do. But unless the words had a regular use, I should not know it was red, and I should not know what colour it was because there would be nothing to know. I know what colour it is because I know red when I see it; I know what red is. (Rhees 1954, 79)

Similarly, in "Notes for a Philosophical Lecture", Wittgenstein notes:

Talking about impressions already means to look at phenomena in one particular way, i.e., to think about them in one particular fashion. "What does green look like to me? - it looks like this □ to me." - "This is the colour impression which I'm calling 'green'."

Am I sure I'm talking about my private *impression*? And how can I be sure - ? Do I *feel* that I'm talking about the impression? What happens? I look at a green patch, I concentrate my attention on such a patch and I say these words. But what kind of a patch? Not on a green one. On one that seems to deserve the name "green"? It is not true that I see impressions before me and that they are the primary objects. In the sense in which I can't explain "what green looks like to me", *I can't say that I know what it looks like either.* (NPL, 457; last italics added)

To me, all these remarks suggest that in the case of private objects and a private table, there is indeed *nothing* to know. Therefore, it is nonsensical to say that I know that this patch is red because I am now having a particular colour impression, which I call 'red'. This point also holds for the concept of 'memory' in the private diary case Wittgenstein introduces in PI, § 258. Here, too, the question is not whether I apply my memory rightly or wrongly, but that instead the instrument of our memory is of no *use* in such a case. It would not mean anything to say that my memory justifies me in saying that I am having the same sensation again because here, too, there is nothing to remember and therefore nothing to tell me whether I have applied my memory rightly or wrongly. Memory scepticism is not at issue.

#### **4 Subjective Memory and Justification: Apropos PI, § 258**

In PI, § 258, Wittgenstein introduces the famous thought experiment about someone who wants to keep a diary about the recurrence of a particular sensation, whereby a definition of the sign cannot be expressed. For the record, the person simply associates the sensation with the sign and writes it down whenever the sensation appears. She thereby concentrates her attention on the sensation, pointing inwardly, so to speak. The failure of a baptism by ostensibly defining a private sample to fix the meaning of the sensation sign has already been discussed at great length. But just to make this important point again in connection with PI, § 258: let us assume that a diarist writes down the sign 'S' and at the same time concentrates her attention on S by pointing inwardly. Thereby she ostensibly defines 'S' by introducing and fixing S as its meaning. Let us further assume that two days later, the diarist notices a fresh sensation, and in order to find out whether it is S, she uses the S-sample and compares. Now, what if she misidentifies another sensation for S without realising it? Since she still *thinks* it is S and therefore believes that she has followed the meaning rule for 'S' correctly in applying the primal sample S, she writes down 'S' again. She is thereby convinced that she is right because she

believes she is using the originally defined sensation S as a sample. According to Ayer, I guess, we would have to say that she just made a mistake, comparable to Crusoe, who shot the wrong bird. But again, *being right or wrong* is off the cards. What really happened is that she did not use S and apply it to the fresh sensation, but instead *fixed* an entirely new rule for the meaning of 'S' by introducing or *giving* a new sample, without knowing it. After all, the fresh sensation is not S. And when, three days later, yet another sensation occurs, the diarist compares it with S again and writes down 'S' if she thinks it is S. However, she would just compare it with the *newly* introduced sample three days ago, without knowing it. And if she misidentifies the sensation for the second time (either for S or S<sub>new</sub>), again she would not have *used* a sample, but would instead introduce a new rule by ostensibly defining a new sample. This is what Wittgenstein means when he says that private rules are only *impressions* of rules and that whatever is going to *seem* correct for the diarist will *be* correct for her (cf. PI, §§ 258-60). The diarist only thinks she is following a rule but instead constantly introduces new meaning rules whenever she misidentifies sensation S. I actually think that this is the crux of the confusion between giving a sample and using a sample, giving a definition and making a statement, which I discussed in section 2.2.

Particularly in PI, § 258, our human memory plays a crucial role in this context. The last part of this paper will therefore focus on our memories and try to show that they logically cannot serve as a tool to fix or retain the meanings of private sensation words.

In a letter to Ilham Dilman, dated 9 March 1965, Rhees writes:

It may even be a misfortune that Wittgenstein brought in the imagined case of keeping a diary of one's sensations – partly because diaries often are private in a sense that is irrelevant here, although he brought it in partly to emphasize this contrast. And partly because Pepys, and no doubt others, have written diaries in a private language. Pepys' language has been deciphered, and Wittgenstein used to mention it in order to make clear that this was not the sense of "private language" with which he was concerned. But the example may have made people fall just into those confusions it was intended to prevent; I do not know.

As we all know, Wittgenstein himself used to keep diaries, particularly during the First World War and used a secret code for his private remarks.

In the case of a private diary in the strong sense, the person only has her memory as the decision tool for identifying the sensation rightly or wrongly. In this respect, she is like the person who buys several copies of today's morning paper to confirm that what the

paper writes is true (cf. § 265). Now Ayer argues that there is nothing absurd about buying another newspaper of a different type to check the first (cf. Ayer 1954, 71). This suggestion is quite curious because it would turn the example into a public one. If I do not trust what is written in the *Daily Express*, I will buy myself a copy of the *Daily Telegraph* or *The Times* to double-check. Ayer continues:

And in a place where there was only one morning newspaper, but it was so produced that misprints might occur in one copy without occurring in all, it would be perfectly sensible to buy several copies and check them against each other. (71)

This, too, does not seem very plausible, for I can always check possible misprints by applying various obvious standards. Further, it is not clear which one would be the defining “ur-newspaper”. The one with the fewest mistakes? And are we supposed to lay down our private sensation sample to compare it with a present one for possible agreement or disagreement? David Hume already pointed out the difference between present ‘impressions’ and ‘ideas’:

Every one will readily allow, that there is a considerable difference between the perceptions of the mind, when a man feels the pain [...], and when he afterwards recalls to his memory this sensation [...]. The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation. (Hume 1992, 17)

According to Ayer, verification must stop at some point, and in the case of Crusoe’s sensations, there is obviously no further test option beyond his own memory. However, “it does not follow that he has no means of identifying it, or that it does not make sense to say that he identifies it right or wrong” (Ayer 1954, 72). Again, the issue is not whether someone is making mistakes because her memory fools her but she nevertheless still follows the meaning rule. It simply does not make sense to say “I remember having had S yesterday”, either rightly or wrongly, because in the case of a *private* object such as a private sensation, there is simply nothing to remember.

Mundle plays the same horn by arguing that Wittgenstein’s “theory of meaning” demands independent justification for the diarist using ‘S’ for verifying the correctness of his application. And Mundle answers:

Presumably the diarist has a memory, has the capacity to recognize what he feels as well as what he sees or hears; and what grounds are there for embracing skepticism concerning people’s capacities to recognize their sensations, and to remember some

of their earlier sensations and compare these with their present ones? (Mundle 1966, 39)

He also offers the case of a diarist which shows that he obviously did not get Wittgenstein's point at all:

Suppose our diarist is liable to suffer from spells of tummy trouble which his doctor cannot diagnose. The onset of such attacks has been preceded by distinctive shooting sensations in his midriff, and has involved several days of different but equally unpleasant sensations, during which time, unless he sticks to a light and simple diet, he vomits and has to retire to bed. Our diarist starts writing 'E' in his diary ('E' being short for 'those damned twinges') in order to verify whether E's are regularly followed by the other symptoms, because this information might help the doctor's diagnosis. Having confirmed this, he continues to record E's in his diary to remind himself to cancel all engagements to eat out for the next few days. It is surely unwarranted dogmatism to say that in such cases 'E' has no meaning for the diarist. Does not everyone experience some types of sensation which are so distinctive and so frequent that he has no more difficulty in recognizing them than he has in recognizing apples or 'apples'? (41)

To me, this seems like a perfect example of a *useful* case of keeping a diary about one's own sensations or pains. Wittgenstein himself presents such a case in PI, § 270, where he discusses someone recording a particular sensation, as a manometer indicates that blood pressure rises whenever the sensation occurs. This provides a valuable result, informing the person when their blood pressure is increasing without having to rely on the manometer. In this scenario, it does not matter whether the person identifies the sensation correctly or not. Rhees remarks:

Example of thinking about what to tell the doctor about my pain today, different from two days ago, etc. I might compare the relevant sensations, and that is all right and common enough. But here, I am concerned with what I am to say about sensations in a way that I expect the doctor may understand, for instance. And I am not concerned in any way with private languages. (Rhees, unpublished)

In the case of the private diarist in § 258, however, the question of recognising the sensation, whether rightly or wrongly, is not the point. Similar to the private chart example, we would not know what it means to say that I am justified in writing down 'S' because my memory tells me so. Since no meaning for 'S' has been established,



there is indeed nothing to remember, and it makes no sense to say that my memory was right or my memory fooled me. Rhees notes:

There is the question of what would be involved in “meaning the same experience”, and that would be closely connected with recognizing the experience when it occurs again. There is a kind of parallel between knowing red when I see it and knowing pain when I feel it. And I want to say that in both cases, it is a matter of knowing the language. And that means that in both cases, it is a matter of knowing how the language is spoken, which, again, has to do with the agreement in people’s reactions.

A rule is something that is kept. The meaning of a word is something that is kept. It is for that reason that I can talk about seeing the same colour that I saw a moment ago. [...] But it is possible to talk about seeing the same colour because I know red when I see it.

(I can check my memory by imagining the timetable page because that is not mere imagining. In the “private” case, there would be no way of distinguishing a memory image from a fantasy. And it would mean nothing to try to distinguish them.) (The main question is as to what could we even mean by saying “I know it is the same sensation again.”) (Rhees 5 April 1954, unpublished)

About two months later, Rhees continues:

But when it was suggested that there could not be a private language because there would be no criterion to tell whether one was using a name for a sensation in the same way – the reply was suggested that all that one needs to do is to remember the sensation for which it was used before, and see whether that is the same as the sensation that is being experienced now. One of the principal difficulties in this is in the notion “seeing whether it is the same”; because that is something that presupposes an existing language, presupposes criteria of identity. We know how to distinguish the same meaning from a different meaning just as we can recognize ambiguity, and so forth. We know this because we have learned the language and speak it as we do. But in the case of a private language those criteria could hardly have any application. And it is not at all clear what could be meant by “seeing that it is the same”.

That is one point, and probably the fundamental one. But another is connected with that when we ask what it would mean to say that you trust your memory in such a case. How do you know that it is a memory, or how do you know that your memory is not playing

you tricks? In the vast majority of cases we do know that our memories are not playing tricks. But we also know the difference between the case in which your memory does play us tricks and that in which it does not.

One must understand what is being asked there, otherwise it has no sense to say that here and in the majority of cases I do remember correctly. That is one point. Another is that my memory's playing me tricks must be the exception; the rule must be that our memories do not play us tricks. *That is essential for the distinction that we make between correctly and incorrectly at all.*

We learn how to use "I remember" by learning the language. We do not learn it by having a special experience. [...] "I remember" is *not* a description of something going on inside me. That is not how we have learned it. Obviously "I remember" does not refer to some present experience which verifies it. But if I trust my memory, I do not "trust" the sensation or the experience which I am having.

I know what it would mean to discover that my memory had played me trick. But in the case of a private sensation about which I cannot speak to anybody, I do not know what it would mean to discover that.

If *all* I have to appeal to is *my* "memory", this is no help: it does not do anything to show that the other memory is "correct". If I can check my memory by the timetable, the case is different. In the majority of cases of course I do not need to check it. But the point is that it is sensible to speak of checking it or consider checking it. *And it is for this reason that it is sensible to speak of my memory as correct, and to speak of trusting it.*

In the case of the private memory it does not even make sense to speak of checking it that way. For this reason, it can have no relation to the way in which we have learned to use the expression "I remember". And we do not know what would be meant by saying that it was correct or that it was incorrect.

Ayer misses the point of the morning papers example, partly because he does not consider what is involved in the "checking against one another" which he mentions in his objection. That is all part of what I have called an institution. The point of the example was to suggest a case in which it makes no sense to speak of such checking.

In the case of private sensations we would not know what it means to discover that our memories have played us tricks. And that is another difficulty in the way of suggesting that you can remember how you used it before. It is connected with the question

of whether you can remember that you are using “the same” in the same way as you used it before.

The main point is that it would not even make *sense* to ask whether you were remembering correctly or not. Which is important if you want to decide whether there could be anything like a rule of language. What could be meant by discovering that you were using the expression *incorrectly*? *In this kind of language*?

There is no suggestion that you cannot remember whether this sensation is the same as you had before or not. Of course you can. And of course you do not depend generally upon anybody’s corroboration when you do. But in all this you are employing the language and the concepts that we normally do employ in speaking about sensations. And it is hard to think of comparing the sensation you have with the sensation you remember in any other way.

An expression like “the colour is what it looks like” is very confusing and reminds one of the idea that you can learn what colours are – what red is – just by looking at them. This is again the idea that what the word means is what it can possibly refer to.

Unless there are rules of language, then it does not help to say that you can remember that it is the same as that was.

The remembering that it is the same is in a way question begging, as far as this matter of private languages is concerned. Or perhaps one could even say that it is contradictory, because it is assuming that what you are describing as entirely private in this sense, is something that is *not* entirely private in this sense, – that it is something to which you can apply the criteria of identity or sameness which belong to the things that you speak of in ordinary language.

I do not think it would make sense for Ayer’s Crusoe [...] to remember that it was the same as the sensation he is having now.

Unless there are rules, it does not make any difference what you say. You could say anything. You might make the sound that you make or make the inward gesture or whatever it may be that you make, when you have a sensation. (Rhees 30 June 1954)

These remarks succinctly capture the essential points related to “remembering that it is the same” and are self-explanatory.

Ultimately, Wittgenstein does not argue that the ascription of meaning to a sign requires justification (cf. PI, § 289). Instead, he contends that if a sign has meaning, it has a use and can be used incorrectly. Therefore, the act of ‘ascribing meaning privately’ is not

valid. Wittgenstein had previously addressed the notion that rules of language do not need justification from reality in his 1930-33 lectures and *Philosophical Grammar*. He emphasised that rules are arbitrarily established and cannot be deduced from or justified by the facts of reality. They are arbitrary precisely because they are not determined by reality in the way descriptions are. Therefore, it is nonsensical to assert that the rules for words like 'red' or 'blue' correspond to specific facts about these colours (cf. PG, 246. Cf. also PR, 55).

When someone claims to have a justification for saying, for example, "I now feel toothache", it is acceptable as long as it simply means that she is speaking the truth. In other words, a justification for such statements is only meant to rule out the possibility of lying or play-acting. Saying, "I have a justification for saying that I am in pain now", essentially means "it is true", "it is indeed the case", or "I am not lying" (cf. WCL, 98).

In "Lectures on Similarity", Wittgenstein remarks:

Suppose I look at the colour of these shoes and say, "I now see brown", I'm then very inclined to say: "There is something which made me say 'brown', just me [now], namely, that I had a peculiar impression". The idea of this justification would be roughly this: not a justification derived from a rule, but a justification by intuition. "This impression I now have justifies me in saying 'I see brown'." When I said "this impression", I could have been said to point to an impression. For whose sake am I pointing? "This impression I now have justifies me in saying 'I see brown'" could only mean "Looking at these shoes justifies me [in saying 'I see brown']". It seems as though I pointed privately, and informed myself of the fact that this impression justified me. The words are entirely all right in "What I see justifies me", but I am inclined to do something very queer with them. "What I see justifies me" is a case of meaning "They are brown, and if you look you'll see for yourself". If you say, "This impression justifies me", well, so it does, meaning "this impression when I see this". But in this case [the former, philosophical case], I'm saying to myself "This impression justifies me in saying 'brown'".

"One can say it to someone else, but also to oneself." It is not at all clear in all cases what is meant by "saying to myself". Under what circumstances does one say that one says something to oneself? Is it when one says something when one is alone? People assume that language-games played with others can be played with oneself. Cf. giving a present to oneself from the right hand to the left. [Cf. PI, § 268]

I can cheat myself, but not in the same way as I can cheat others. The mere fact that I can ask myself a question, and answer it – give

myself an order - tell myself a lie - the mere fact that there are analogues doesn't yet tell you what the analogue is. (WCL, 104-5)

The concept of someone saying something to herself was previously discussed in section 2.1.

In Lecture 11 of "Lectures on Similarity", Wittgenstein revisits the question of justification by pointing out that we are sometimes inclined to something like the following:

"The peculiar impression I see justifies me in using the word 'brown', quite independently of what anyone else says." Here, it seemed we had a justification independent of any rule given. "If I see brown, by 'brown' I just mean this". How on earth can a word 'brown' refer to an experience?

Pointing is of importance if I want to show someone something - if I say 'Look at this spot'. As a matter of fact, when we point to something, people do something, react in a certain way. If they didn't do that, pointing would be completely useless. (WCL, 107)

This discussion circles back to the question of how words refer to things and the nature of ostensive definitions.

The discussion of Wittgenstein and Rhees on the possibility of a 'private language' aimed to demonstrate that such a language, in the 'strong' sense, is impossible. This is due to our inability to establish any meaningful rules, given the confusion between giving a sample and using it. Consequently, one cannot communicate with others or even oneself. Additionally, in the realm of 'subjective knowledge' and our memory of 'private' sensations, there is fundamentally nothing to know and nothing to remember. In Rhees' words:

The point is that no one could invent just *language*. Language goes with a way of living. An invented language would be a wallpaper pattern; nothing more. (Rhees 1954, 87)

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