

# Wittgenstein and Scepticism\*

BERNARD HARRISON

Scepticism is *not* irrefutable, but *obvious nonsense* if it tries to doubt where no question can be asked.

For doubt can only exist where a question exists; a question can only exist where an answer exists, and this can only exist where something *can* be *said*.

— Wittgenstein, NB, p. 44

## 1. Introduction

Saul Kripke's work<sup>1</sup> on rule scepticism has provided the stimulus for a good deal of new work on the interpretation of Wittgenstein. With much of this work I am in general agreement: certainly, the broader conclusions for which I shall argue here will not be particularly new or revolutionary ones. I hold, with David Pears<sup>2</sup>, Colin McGinn<sup>3</sup>, G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker<sup>4</sup> that Wittgenstein did not subscribe to the fascinating new form of scepticism ascribed to him by Kripke, but that, on the contrary, the general tenor of Wittgenstein's later, as of his earlier work, is antisceptical. With Baker and Hacker, and against Kripke, I hold that the sections of the *Investigations* preceding § 243 are not the most central passages in the book, and that they certainly do not constitute "the real private language argument", but that, on the contrary, the puzzles about rule-following raised in the paragraphs surrounding § 201 are themselves

---

\* This essay was completed during my tenure of the E. E. Ericksen Distinguished Visiting Chair of Philosophy at the University of Utah, in the Spring Quarter of 1988-9. I am most grateful to the University, and to the Department of Philosophy, for affording me this opportunity to work undisturbed in a peaceful and stimulating environment.

<sup>1</sup> Kripke (1982).

<sup>2</sup> Pears (1988).

<sup>3</sup> McGinn (1984).

<sup>4</sup> Baker and Hacker (1984).

to be explicated in terms of the paragraphs (roughly, § 243 – § 317) normally taken to include the private language argument.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless important questions remain to be answered. While I think it has become more or less unarguable in the light of recent discussion that Wittgenstein was not trying to say, or saying, what the Kripke of 1982 made him say, it still is not entirely clear to many people what exactly he *was* trying to say. That profound and difficult problems arise even over as admittedly central an element of the *Investigations* as the private language argument itself is evident, for instance, from David Pears' discussion of § 270.<sup>6</sup> This, Pears observes, "is an unusually telegraphic text even for Wittgenstein ...". And even though he is prepared to chance his arm on an elucidation, Pears is cautious enough about it to conclude dubiously, "This point is not one which could be established in a brief Wittgensteinian paragraph. It would take a great weight of argument to drive it home, and in this text we only get quick thrusts. So we feel that it all goes by so quickly that we don't quite know whether to agree or disagree." Wittgenstein's style, it seems, still constitutes a formidable barrier to any very confident paraphrase or elucidation of his thought. Similarly the lack of agreement on the precise meaning of Wittgenstein's term "criterion", ubiquitous and essential to the argument as that term is in the *Investigations*, shows itself, as Wittgenstein would say, in the fact that Baker and Hacker, when they come to address the question at p. 111 ff., excuse themselves from offering more than "the merest sketch"; a sketch which turns out to proceed in terms of Wittgensteinian notions, such as that of a "rule of grammar", scarcely less obscure than "criterion" itself. In general, while it seems pretty clear that Wittgenstein's later work is to be taken as including, *inter alia*, extended attacks on many traditional forms of philosophical scepticism, and to some considerable extent clear how the general strategy of these attacks is supposed to go, it remains quite unclear how any of Wittgenstein's anti-sceptical arguments, including the private language argument, are to be reconstructed or elucidated *in detail*; and so quite unclear whether or not Wittgenstein's arguments constitute conclusive rebuttals of scepticism.

Of course one could take Richard Rorty's line and argue that it is useless to look for anything resembling an argument or a rebuttal in Wittgenstein, because Wittgenstein, at least in his post-1929 phase, was not a systematic or analytic philosopher but an edifying one. I cannot, I fear, achieve the order of suspension of disbelief necessary to allow one to swallow this vision of Wittgenstein as a consciously disinvolved ironist

<sup>5</sup> Baker and Hacker (1984), Ch. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Pears (1988), p. 339 – 341.

and satirist whose target was not so much rationally-defended scepticism as rational argument *per se*.<sup>7</sup> The *Philosophical Investigations* is, over very considerable tracts of its length, a tightly and rigorously argued work. What prevents our grasping the articulations, and thus the full force, of its arguments is, on the one hand Wittgenstein's apparently disjointed, or as Pears puts it "telegraphic" manner of writing; and on the other the fact that Wittgenstein's thoughts are so far out of the common road of philosophy that a very far-reaching jettisoning of preconceptions is needed before one can begin to see how Wittgenstein's paragraphs work, either internally or in relation to one another. In the circumstances the natural temptation is to attempt a free reconstruction of Wittgenstein's text which stitches together those bits of it which the interpreter understands, or thinks he understands, and leaves out other bits as very possibly irrelevant and in any event impenetrably obscure. (In this way, as Baker and Hacker observe<sup>8</sup>, the discussions of rule-following which surround § 201 tended to be left completely out of account as hopelessly imponderable, until Kripke did us all the service of showing how the entire book could be, at a pinch, reconstituted around them.) This temptation should be resisted. What is required is very close reading indeed, undertaken with the object, not of selecting convenient passages from here and there to be woven into an essentially new text of the interpreter's own devising, but of making, as far as possible, continuous and coherent sense of the text as Wittgenstein left it. I shall begin by doing my best to read § 256 – 270, which I take to contain the core of the private language argument, in this way. I shall then try to show that and how the strange and substantially unfamiliar argument which emerges from a properly close reading illuminates some of the more puzzling things which Wittgenstein has to say about scepticism, about rule-following, and about criteria.

<sup>7</sup> Rorty (1982), p. 34: "When Wittgenstein is at his best ... he sticks to pure satire. He just shows by examples how hopeless the traditional problems are ... he just makes fun of the whole idea that there is something here to be explained." Even if one were to buy into this general position, there remains, it seems to me, a line to be drawn between interesting, genuinely deflating satire – satire with some intellectual muscle to it – and mere, ignorant jeering. Rorty seems either not to perceive this distinction or to want to locate Wittgenstein on the wrong side of it.

<sup>8</sup> Baker and Hacker (1984), p. 116, "The rule-sceptical interpretation of these remarks [§ 185 – 242] gains much of its allure from the absence of any recognised alternative. Until its advent, this part of the *Investigations* was simply ignored. And if a concern with rule-scepticism is bundled off the stage, will not this segment of the argumentative drama not once again be plunged into obscurity?"

## 2. *Some Preliminaries*

Two common preconceptions about the relationship between the later and the earlier work of Wittgenstein need to be abandoned at the outset. The first, which is no longer widely held, is that while in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein, in common with Frege and most subsequent philosophers of language, took the notions of reference and truth to be crucial in explicating the notion of meaning, in the *Investigations* he abandoned his former interest in reference and truth, proposing instead to explicate the notion of meaning in terms of a variety of types of social interaction bundled together under the label *use*. The second, rather more common at present, is that while Wittgenstein retained in the *Investigations* his earlier interest in truth he abandoned a “realistic” conception of truth in favour of an “anti-realistic” one framed in terms of warranted assertibility.

It is obvious enough that Wittgenstein’s later thought about language pursues a path very remote from that trodden by most analytic philosophy of language, but I doubt whether either of these accounts succeeds in catching the fundamental ground of difference. It would be truer to say, I think, that what distinguishes the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations* from most analytic philosophers of language is not that the later Wittgenstein had ceased to be interested in the notions of reference and truth, but that he had come to regard those notions as deeply problematic ones. Current philosophical debate about reference, for instance, concerns itself largely with the issue of how the relationship between a name and its referent is established and held steady; whether by a description or by an original act of baptism augmented by a causal process of transmission of the consequences of that act. It finds nothing particularly problematic about the name-referent relationship itself. The later Wittgenstein as we know, however, found something queer and teasing about the whole notion of reference construed as a relationship between a name and a thing.

§ 244. How do words *refer* to sensations? — There doesn’t seem to be any problem here; don’t we talk about sensations every day, and give them names? But how is the connection between the name and the thing named set up? —

It might help, therefore, if we were to approach the *Investigations* as an attempt, not to dispense with reference as an explanatory notion in the theory of meaning but, *inter alia*, to bring under scrutiny the *concept* of reference taken for granted by philosophers of language. Most philosophers similarly take truth as a relatively unproblematic relationship obtaining between a sentence and a range of truth conditions. The philosophical debate mainly concerns itself with whether the truth conditions of a sentence should be understood realistically or in terms of some notion

of warranted assertibility. It seems to me that the later Wittgenstein is very largely addressing the prior question of how truth conditions get attached to sentences in the first place; and that he is concerned, among other things, to rebut at least the following two possible accounts of how that relationship gets established:

(1) That we define the truth-conditions of simple indicative sentences by singling out, through pointing or some other deictic procedure, the natural circumstances which they assert to obtain. (How is this singling-out achieved? Why should another person understand the procedure which achieves the singling-out of truth-conditions for a sentence in the way in which I understand it?)

(2) That we establish the truth-conditions of such sentences by observing the conditions in which other speakers are prepared to respond with assent or dissent to their assertion. (What if the conditions which prompt assent or dissent are private and thus unobservable? What if the conditions which prompt assent and dissent are simply too variable, *given the meaning of the sentence*, to allow its meaning to be ascertained in this way?)

What Wittgenstein opposes to both views, it seems to me, is the idea that the truth-conditions of a sentence can be made clear only to someone who has grasped the role which that sentence plays in a practice. So coming to grasp that, and why, a given sentence possesses the truth-conditions it does, does not *only* involve *either* just paying attention while features of the natural world are singled out deictically, *or* just tabulating the circumstances surrounding native assent and dissent in the manner of Quine's anthropologist (though both of those things may come into it); but also, and crucially, acquiring familiarity with, and facility in the operation of, some corresponding practice: the "language-game".

Before approaching the detail of the private language argument we need to decide, in a preliminary way at least, what targets the argument is supposed to be attacking. There is textual evidence for two. The first is the Cartesian doctrine of the essential independence of body and mind (because marshalling the textual evidence for this claim takes us into the fine detail of the argument I shall defer it until the next section). The second is the doctrine about the relationship between language and reality which Wittgenstein opens the *Investigations* by ascribing to Augustine, but which goes back to the *Cratylus* and has been a commonplace of most subsequent philosophy (it is the basis of Locke's and many subsequent empiricist accounts of language, for instance). The substance of the doctrine is that description is possible only on condition that the meanings of the simplest names we use in our descriptions can be established merely by associating those names with *simples*: for example, with simple sensations. Wittgenstein catches the essence of the doctrine in § 256:

And now I simply *associate* names with sensations and use these names in descriptions. —

For convenience, therefore, I shall refer to the doctrine in what follows as the Model of Association and Description. One thing that needs to be noticed, I think, is that the Model of Association and Description and the Cartesian doctrine of the essential independence of mind and body are closely complicit. I don't mean that the Model depends on the doctrine, which it considerably antedates, but rather that a reverse dependence holds: it is not possible to hold that the mind can be known independently of knowing the body, which is what the Cartesian doctrine asserts, unless it is going to be possible to refer to and make statements about mental existents without needing to refer to, or to make statements about, bodily existents. The Model of Association and Description appears to guarantee this possibility. One of the central aims of the private language argument, it seems to me, is to demonstrate that the model is incoherent, the guarantee worthless and the possibility non-existent.

The great support of the Model of Association and Description has always been the difficulty of conceiving of any alternative model. How does Wittgenstein propose to fill this gap? He offers, it seems to me, not one alternative model but many (one for each language-game, to put it crudely). For the special case of pain-language, however, I can see no option but to identify Wittgenstein's alternative model with the one outlined in § 244:

How do words *refer* to sensations? — There doesn't seem to be any problem here; don't we talk about sensations every day, and give them names? But how is the connexion between the name and the thing named set up? This question is the same as: how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations? — of the word "pain" for example. Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, the natural expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour.

"So you are saying that the word 'pain' really means crying?" — On the contrary: the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it.

The trouble with this is that, whatever its merits as armchair anthropology, it just does not seem to address the *philosophical* issues. One feels like saying, "Well enough; but what are the adults who teach the child to replace his untutored screams and cries with "exclamations and, later, sentences" *teaching him to do*, if not to *name* and *describe* his sensations? And if they are *not* teaching him to do those things, why are the "sentences" he later utters, not *still cries*, the only difference being that they are now cries modulated and formed in accordance with a social convention (imagine an affected person, fond of Italian opera, who never said "Ow!" but always *ohi me!*)? Why are utterances learned in the way Wittgenstein

suggests to be called *sentences* at all, in fact? What connection, that is to say, are they supposed to have with reference and truth?" Nevertheless, and despite the persuasiveness of this debunking response, I have come to think both that Wittgenstein has a point in § 244, and that that point, extraordinary as it may seem, is essential both to the strategy of the private language argument and to what I have become convinced is the success of that argument in demolishing its targets. How these things can be I shall now endeavour to explain.

### 3. *The Structure of the Private Language Argument*

The question of which paragraphs of the *Investigations* contain the private language argument is, like everything else about the argument, contentious. One view which has very often been taken is that the argument is addressed centrally to the issue of whether it would be possible for the possessor of a purely private sensation to name and refer to it, and that Wittgenstein's point is that naming and reference would not be possible in such circumstances because (1) naming requires the possibility of re-identifying the entity named, and (2) a purely private sensation cannot be reidentified.<sup>9</sup> This reading of the argument more or less confines it to a single paragraph: § 258, which concerns the famous diary-entry "S." I think that there is an argument of very much wider scope which includes § 258 as one of its steps, and which is not materially weakened or truncated if one takes it as running from § 256 — § 270. I shall take these paragraphs in strict sequence.

#### § 256: The *Verknüpfung* of pain and its natural expression

Now, what about the language which describes my inner experiences and which only I myself can understand? *How* do I use words to stand for my sensations? — As we ordinarily do? Then are my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensation [*mit meinen natürlichen Empfindungsausserungen verknüpft*]? In that case my language is not a "private" one. Someone else might understand it as well as I. — But suppose I didn't have any natural expression for the sensation, but only had the sensation? And now I simply *associate* names with sensations and use these names in descriptions. —

<sup>9</sup> Pears (1988), p. 328, appears to take this traditional view. After observing, correctly, that "It would be simplistic to suppose that it is possible to take a late text of Wittgenstein's, cut along the dotted lines and find that it falls into neatly separated arguments", he singles out the private language argument as an exception. "The topic is the reidentification of sensation-types, and the argument is that a case can be described in which there would be no distinction between applying a word to a sensation-type correctly and applying it incorrectly."

The first thing to be noticed about this, it seems to me, is the indeterminate ending of the final sentence. It trails off, inviting the response, “Well, what then? Go on.” At this point we might do well to recall the first sentence of the penultimate paragraph of the Preface: “I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking.” The point of the terminal dash here is, then, perhaps to invite the reader to do a little thinking on his own account; to complete the train of thoughts outlined in the paragraph for himself: to put two and two together to make ... what, exactly? Well, the paragraph invites us to consider two possible ways in which behaviour expressive of bodily sensation might be related to the bodily sensations of which it is expressive. The second possibility is that the relationship might be the one postulated by the Model of Association and Description as providing the standard link between a name and what it names, that is: *conventional association*. Let us imagine some people whose situation really is correctly describable in these terms. If they happen to be in pain, for instance, any gestures or facial expressions they may exhibit by way of drawing attention to the fact will be related to the pain they feel only by the link of conventional association. Their expression and gestures will not constitute a *natural* expression of pain, that is, but a merely conventional one. As with any mere convention, now, it will be up to them whether they choose to obey this one or not. If they happen to be in pain they can, if they choose, “wave their hand to signify as much”,<sup>10</sup> or, equally, they can choose not to give any sign to others of their interior condition.

Having got to this point in our description it is evident, I think, that the description we are attempting to give is under profound internal strain. It is supposed to describe people whose bodily expressions of pain are connected only conventionally to their feelings of pain; but if that *is* the connection what sense could there be in saying that these people *felt* such a thing as pain, in the sense in which we feel pain? The problem is not merely — indeed not at all — the sceptical one that we have no means of independently verifying that they really feel any pain when they give whatever conventional signal it is that is supposed to indicate that they are in pain. The problem is to see what conceivable grounds we, or for that matter they, could have under the circumstances described for calling what they are said to experience and signal in the manner described *pain*. Pain, after all, makes one cry out, unless, by an act of will, one restrains

---

<sup>10</sup> “But if you happen to be deaf and dumb,  
And do not understand a word I say,  
Then wave your hand to signify as much.” — A. E. Housman, *Fragment of a Greek Tragedy*.



the impulse. These people, *ex hypothesi*, feel no impulse to cry out. What difference does it make then, (what difference in the world is the difference between the two forms of words supposed to mark?) whether we say that these are people for whom pain lacks a natural expression, or whether we say that they are people who do not feel pain?

That, I think, is pretty obviously (additional textual grounds will follow shortly) how we are supposed to answer the rhetorical question (“Suppose ... etc.”) with which § 256 concludes. Completing the thought there left dangling in this way has the advantage of throwing some light back on the earlier part of the paragraph, and in particular on the puzzling expression which Anscombe translates “tied up with” [*verknüpft*]. Interpreters have frequently taken Wittgenstein at this point to be arguing for the existence of some sort of *semantic* relationship between pain and pain-behaviour. The idea attributed to him by this reading is, roughly speaking, that “our language” makes pain-behaviour “criterial” for the truth or falsity of assertions to the effect that someone is in pain. Clearly, Wittgenstein’s notion of a criterion must be a cloudy and potent one indeed if it is to bear this order of epistemic weight, and much ink has been spilled in the endeavour to blow away the clouds and unveil the source of the potency. That ink, I suspect, may have been spilled in vain. The contrast between two kinds of relationship between pain and pain-behaviour which Wittgenstein is drawing in the paragraph is clearly a contrast between, on the one hand, a relationship which *conventionally* associates certain behaviour with a certain sensation and a relationship which is “natural” *in the sense of not being conventional*. Such a relationship as is constituted, for instance, by the fact that pain makes us cry out, unless by an effort of will we repress the impulse. But a relationship like that is not determined by *language*; is not, then, *criterial* as that term has been used, if not by Wittgenstein, then in quite a lot of Wittgenstein exegesis; its obtaining is just a contingent feature of our existential situation.

Wittgenstein’s suggestion is that if the natural relationship between a sensation (pain, say) and its “natural expression” holds, then “my language is not a ‘private’ one. Someone else might understand it as well as I.” Let us see if we can now make sense of this. In the case of the (incoherently specified) tribe for whom pain, say, is connected to pain behaviour only by an associative convention, there is a clear sense in which *we* cannot understand — can make no sense of — their putatively “expressive” behaviour or words. It is all one (it comes to the same thing) whether we say that when they feel pain they feel no impulse to cry out or whether we say that they feel no pain (for what conceivable grounds could there be for calling “pain” what does not make one want to cry out?). Another, and more characteristically Wittgensteinian way of putting the point would

be to say that their situation is not one in which our concept of pain *can find a foothold*. It makes no more sense to ask whether these people are or are not in pain than to ask whether the kettle is in pain. So we don't, so far at any rate, understand *what, exactly, their behaviour or talk betokens*.

Suppose, now, we are dealing with people for whom the natural relationship between pain and anguished outcry does obtain, just as it does for us. A child cries out in pain, or says, weeping, "It hurts, it hurts!" Here we *do* understand: *these* words, *this* behaviour, in contrast to the words and behaviour of the people for whom there is only a conventional relationship between a sensation and its expression, are not in the least imponderable. We understand because (a) the child is clearly disabled from getting on with its play by the sensations it is experiencing, and (b) we know very well what kind of sensation it is that forces one to cry out and disables one from getting on with the business of the day, or if we do not we can find out very simply by (say) laying one hand flat to a red-hot piece of iron. Here, then, it does make sense to ask whether the child is in pain (our concept of pain does find a foothold in the situation). Of course, the child may be play-acting. But there are means of determining whether someone is, in such circumstances, play-acting. We can put them, for instance, in circumstances in which, as it must appear to them, further play-acting will serve no useful purpose, and in which quick, calm and decisive action may secure them gains which we know them to desire greatly. If, in such circumstances, some inner distress still appears to be disabling them from taking such action it will be very difficult not to conclude that they are, in fact, in pain.

The point towards which Wittgenstein is directing us in § 256, then, seems to be this. Under normal circumstances we understand very well what someone who says he is in pain is asserting to be the case. He is not, therefore, speaking a private language, a language "which describes his inner experiences and which only he can understand", but a language which refers to something, namely pain, which is "public" in the sense that we have all experienced it and know very well what it is. This understanding between us can only exist, however, in virtue of the existence of the natural (i.e., not merely conventional or associative) relationship which subsists between pain and its "natural expressions" [*Empfindungsäusserungen*]. If we imagine that natural relationship absent, or replaced *per impossibile* by a merely conventional or associative relationship, then we find that we are envisaging a situation in which that understanding, and with it the possibility of raising and resolving questions about whether or not people are in pain, and indeed the possibility of finding any foothold at all in the situation for our ordinary concept of pain, would simply lapse into vacuity. In other words, the possibility of using sensation-language

— of using a term like “pain”, for instance — is a function of the maintenance of certain definite features of our natural situation. When those are present we know what we are referring to by means of such terms, and how to set about assigning truth-values to sentences constructed in which they occur. When they are absent, or imagined as absent, we no longer know either how to determine the reference of the terms in question or how to assess the truth-values of sentences in which they figure.

We can now begin to see how the model of the connection between pain-language and pain outlined in § 244 can constitute, despite the debunking rebuttal I sketched earlier, a serious and philosophically interesting rival to the Model of Association and Description. Introducing words as substitutes for primitive, natural expressions of pain like crying allows them to ride in piggyback, as it were, on the back of the natural, non-conventional, existential relationships which link crying to pain. As the argument of § 256 has begun to make clear, that is in fact the only conceivable way in which a public, mutually understandable language allowing reference to pain could get off the ground.

#### § 257. The child who invents a name for his sensation

“What would it be like if human beings shewed no outward sign of pain (did not groan, grimace, etc.)? Then it would be impossible to teach a child the use of the word ‘tooth-ache’.” — Well, let’s assume the child is a genius and itself invents a name for the sensation! — But then, of course, he couldn’t make himself understood when he used the word. — So does he understand the name, without being able to explain its meaning to anyone? — But what does it mean to say that he has “named his pain”? — How has he done this naming of pain?! And whatever he did, what was its purpose? — When one says “He gave a name to his sensation” one forgets that a great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense. And when we speak of someone’s having given a name to pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word “pain”; it shews the post where the new word is stationed.

The first thing to be noticed about § 257 is its continuity with the preceding paragraph. We are still discussing, that is, the possibility which we are invited to envisage in the concluding two sentences of § 256: the possibility that there might be people for whom the link — the *Verknüpfung* — that exists for us between pain and its natural bodily expression did not exist. This general premise or condition of the discussion, reinforced here in the first sentence of § 257, is not rescinded in subsequent paragraphs. It continues to determine the course of the discussion up to and including § 270. Though this, as a purely philological comment on the text, of a kind perhaps more proper to literary scholarship than to philosophy, seems very difficult to dispute — once noticed, it stares one in the face — it has

important philosophical consequences which, so far as I am aware, have not generally been noticed by Wittgenstein's philosophical commentators. It means, among other things, that the putative speakers of "private languages" whom Wittgenstein discusses — the diary keeper of § 258, and so on — *are not supposed to be people like us!* They are supposed to be people suffering from a queer defect: that for them there *is* no *Verknüpfung* between pain and any natural expression of pain. It follows that a good deal of critical discussion of the private language argument which has attempted to address the issue of whether *people like us* — Robinson Crusoes, hermits, inveterate solitaries and the like — could successfully invent and use Wittgensteinian "private languages", on the assumption that this is the issue which occupies Wittgenstein, has failed, simply and completely, to grasp the nature of the issue under discussion, through insufficiently careful reading of a difficult, telegraphic, but not, in the end, hopelessly inscrutable text. An immediate corollary of this point is that — as anyone can convince himself by tracing back the linkages of pronominal reference which connect sentence 3 of § 257 to sentences 1 and 2 — the child who "is a genius and itself invents a name for the sensation" in sentence 3 is, also, a child belonging to a race of human beings who "shew no outward signs of pain". David Pears, in Volume II of *The False Prison*, takes it to be a serious question for Wittgenstein — one, that is, which Wittgenstein ought to raise, and answer in the affirmative; but one for which, at the same time, it is not too easy to see what grounds Wittgenstein could have for such an answer — whether it would be "conceptually impossible for an intelligent wolf-child to set up a private language to record his life in the forest", and therefore finds it odd and exegetically puzzling that "this kind of case is not mentioned in *Philosophical Investigations*".<sup>11</sup> I am none too happy to find myself disagreeing with Pears, whose work on Russell and Wittgenstein I have admired for many years, but I think that in this case he has things, rather rarely for him, badly askew. Wittgenstein does not discuss wolf-children because they are not to the point; and they are not to the point because the issue in hand is not whether it is conceptually intelligible to imagine people just like us *who happen to have grown up in isolation from other human beings* inventing and using private languages; but whether it is conceptually intelligible to imagine people who "shewed no outward sign of pain", people for whom pain had no "natural expression" [*Empfindungsausserung*] performing such feats. The contrast with which the private language argument is mainly occupied, that is, is not, contrary to general belief, the contrast between linguistic community and linguistic

<sup>11</sup> Pears (1988), p. 334 *et seq.*

isolation (a point which has implications for the Hume-style “sceptical solution” which Kripke attributes to Wittgenstein), but the contrast between the ordinary situation in which sensations and other “inner events” are intrinsically linked to bodily *Empfindungsausserungen* of one sort and another, and imaginary cases in which these links are broken.

The point of focusing the argument on this contrast, I take it, is to put under strain the complicity between the Model of Association and the Cartesian doctrine of the essential independence of mind and body. Once the link between pain and its natural expression is broken we are left with a pure case, as it were, of the essential separation Descartes had in mind. Pain sensations in the inner, mental world, bodily movements in the outer, physical one, just lie inertly side by side, as it were; distinct phenomena belonging to distinct explanatory realms. The processes of interaction which connect relevant events in each realm across the gap of difference in essence which separates the mental from the physical realm are now, moreover, perspicuous, in the sense that they depend solely upon conventionally established associations between names and types of sensation. We are no longer faced, that is, with the “obscure”, intellectually inscrutable relationship between pain and pain-behaviour which subsists in real life, and which puzzles Descartes in the *Meditations*<sup>12</sup>. Read in this way, the first sentence of § 257 taken together with the last two of § 256 furnishes the textual grounds I mentioned earlier for taking Cartesianism, in its connection with the Model of Association and Description, to be one of the targets of the private language argument.

Having focused, by way of the child and the tribe who “shew no outward sign of pain”, upon the picture of the relationship between mental event and bodily manifestation offered by Cartesianism taken in combination with the Model of Association and Description, Wittgenstein proceeds to argue, along lines closely related to our suggested amplification of § 256, that that picture is incoherent. The argument, naturally, has the form of a *reductio*. The first absurd consequence to be extracted from the model is that it would be impossible to teach a child for whom pain had no natural bodily expression the use of the word “toothache”. Toothache is a sensation in your teeth so sharp it makes you cry out unless by an effort of will you repress the impulse. The child, *ex hypothesi*, has no sensations characterisable in that way, so it will be hard for him to make

<sup>12</sup> “But when I inquired, why, from some, I know not what, painful sensation, there follows sadness of mind ... I could give no reason, excepting that nature taught me so; for there is certainly no affinity (that I at least can understand) between ... the perception of whatever causes pain and the thought of sadness which arises from this perception.” — Haldane and Ross (1911), p. 188.

any sense of what we are doing when we gesture towards our faces contorted with what to us is agony, but to him is only a queer expression we seem for some unguessable reason unable to discard, and say “tooth-ache!”. A second consequence is that even if “the child is a genius and itself invents a name for a sensation”, he still “couldn’t make himself understood when he used the word”. If he were to cry out in pain, that is, we should know at once, as we do in ordinary life, what kind of “inner sensation” was troubling him. But *ex hypothesi* there is for the child no natural connection between pain and crying out, or any other bodily manifestation. Pain has, for him, no *Empfindungsausserungen*. So he just utters, calmly, the name he has invented. It is now very hard to see how any other person who hears him make this sound could have any means of discovering (a) that the sound the child utters is supposed to be understood as a token of a name, (b) that the name is supposed to be understood as a name for a type of sensation, (c) which type of sensation that is. Cartesianism augmented by the Model of Association and Description does not, that is, explain, as it pretends to, how it is possible for one mind to communicate to another the nature of the sensations it is experiencing: rather, it makes the possibility of communicating about sensations radically unintelligible.

So far so good. But perhaps Cartesianism plus the Model of Association and Description, if it cannot give an adequate account of communication, can at least give some account of what it is barely to understand a name for a sensation. The remainder of § 257 introduces, and § 258 drives home, an argument designed to exclude this possibility. The issue is introduced in sentence 5 of § 257, by a means of a rhetorical question: “— So does he understand its name, without being able to explain its meaning to anyone?” The question is immediately answered by another: “But what does it mean to say that he has ‘named his pain?’” The implication is that it does *not* mean simply that he has associated a name with a sensation, and the remainder of the paragraph, without as yet backing up this suspicion with an argument, goes on to explore, in a preliminary way, the nature of this suspicion. The suggestions made are, in effect, that the Model of Association and Description offers too simple an account of naming: that naming presupposes “a great deal of stage-setting in the language”, and that the function of this “stage-setting” is to establish “the grammar” of the name. “Grammar” is further, if somewhat opaquely, characterised as what “shews the post where the new word is stationed”.

### § 258. The diarist

Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign “S” and write this

sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation. — I will remark first of all that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated. — But still I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition. — How? Can I point to the sensation? Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation — and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. — But what is this ceremony for? for that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign. — Well, that is done precisely by the concentration of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connexion between the sign and the sensation. — But “I impress it on myself” can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can’t talk about “right”.

The diarist of § 258 is not Wittgenstein, and he is not Robinson Crusoe, either. He is the child of § 257. That is established by the development of the discussion up to this point in the text. What we are discussing is the issue of how much needs to be presupposed for “the mere act of naming to make sense”. We are discussing *that*, remember, for the sake of the light it might throw on the issue of whether the child in § 257, even though he could neither be taught the meaning of our word “tooth-ache” nor communicate to others the meaning of the name he has invented, might nevertheless intelligibly be said to understand the name he has invented. Wittgenstein’s thought, or hunch, about that was that the child’s situation might not allow him enough “stage-setting” for whatever putative “naming procedure” he may be supposed to go through to result in the establishment of the meaning of a name. Unless, therefore, § 258 introduces a new discussion entirely unconnected to the discussion introduced in § 256 — an entirely gratuitous suggestion for which there is textually, so far as I can see, no warrant whatsoever — we are still discussing the child. We are still discussing, therefore, the case of a human being for whom pain has no *natürliche Äusserungen*. The task before us is, first of all, to examine what possible naming procedures such a being could apply to the task of introducing into his language a name for pain — a name whose meaning, if we are to accept the argument of § 257, only he could ever come to understand; but a name whose meaning, *ex hypothesi*, he does understand.

Once again, purely textual considerations yield a philosophical corollary. If the diarist of § 258 who encounters difficulties in naming his sensations encounters those difficulties because, for him, the link between pain and its natural expression is disrupted, it follows that the rest of us, including wolf-boys and Robinson Crusoes, for whom that linkage is not disrupted, should encounter no such difficulties. The existence of the normal connection between pain and its natural expression should provide sufficient “stage-setting”, that is, to allow the word “pain” to be given a meaning:

to establish its “grammar”; to “shew the post [in language, that is, cf. § 29] where it is stationed”. It is not difficult to see why this should be so. If pain is connected in the usual way to its natural expression, then I have a criterion of correctness for the act of writing down the sign “pain”, or what comes to the same thing, a criterion of identity for the sensation-kind *pain*. I should write down the sign “pain” whenever I feel a sensation which makes me want to cry out. (“Of course,” the sceptic will instantly interpolate, “the sensation which makes you want to do that might not be “the” sensation at all: it might be a different sensation each time!”) Wittgenstein answers this objection in § 270, making, as we shall see, at that final point of the argument what is, so far as I can see, the only move in the private language argument which bears directly upon scepticism, but which bears upon it altogether crushingly.)

Wittgenstein’s diarist, however, does not have the option of identifying S as the sensation which makes him want to cry out. It does not: it is a creature of the Cartesian theatre of the mind; a purely mental object which stands in no relationship whatsoever to anything physical or bodily. It is simply present to the diarist’s consciousness. Wittgenstein’s first two moves in the discussion of § 258 are simple and obviously sound. The first is to point out that the diarist will be unable to formulate any definition of “S”. This is clearly right, for what S picks out is a simple, *sui generis* object, akin to the simples of the *Tractatus* or to a Lockean simple idea: one of those “simples” dear to atomistic metaphysics, in other words, which cannot be described but only named. This move limits the range of possible procedures of name-introduction open to the diarist to one: ostensive definition. Wittgenstein’s second move is to point out that even this move is not available to the diarist “in the ordinary sense”. S is not situated in any space in which the diarist could single it out by a physical act of pointing, in other words. The diarist’s one remaining option is to engage in an immaterial act of pointing; a mere concentrating of attention on S while uttering or writing the sign “S”. (This in effect offers a fuller specification of the description “And now I simply *associate* names with sensations” in § 256). Name-introduction works in ordinary circumstances, now, by specifying some set of criteria by appeal to which both the person who introduces the name and other speakers can distinguish between cases of correct application of the name and cases of incorrect application. In the case of the sign “pain” as used by people such as ourselves for whom the connection between pain and its natural expression is unbroken, such criteria are available. But for the diarist they are not. The only description under which the diarist can identify the sensation-type S is “The sensation I decided to call “S””. But which sensation-type *did* the diarist decide to call “S”? This matter is between the diarist and himself. As Wittgenstein



rightly says, anything the diarist calls correct *is* correct, which is only to say that in the diarist's situation there is no distinction between correctness and incorrectness of application to be drawn. Therefore the diarist, and thus the child of § 257, cannot be said to understand the meaning of the name he has bestowed upon his inner sensation, for the simple reason that there is nothing to understand: no name has been bestowed. All that has happened is that an empty ceremony, a parody of a real naming-procedure, has been gone through, but, naturally enough, without practical effect.

§ 259 – 269 contain comments of two general types upon the argument of § 256 – 258: general reflections designed to bring out implications of the argument, and analogies designed to bring into focus more clearly what it is about the situation of the diarist which renders his attempt to name his sensation nugatory and without effect. It is not until § 270 that the argument takes a fresh, and final, step forward.

#### § 259. Rules and impressions of rules

Are the rules of the private language *impressions* of rules? – The balance on which impressions are weighed is not the *impression* of a balance.

This sounds gnominically obscure, but is really only terse and witty. One might be tempted to think that a naming procedure designed to attach names to purely subjective objects – *impressions* – might need criteria of correctness of application, all right; but criteria which, since I require them only for my own private and inward guidance, need only be, themselves, *subjective* criteria, criteria which no-one else need be able to put into operation (“*impressions* of rules”, in fact). Wittgenstein answers this with a joke: I cannot carry out real weighing operations upon an imaginary balance (cf. the further analogies of this general purport which occupy § 165 – 168). So if I am going to “weigh” (take note, even for purely private and interior purposes, of the nature, intensity and so forth) of my inner states, then for that reason alone the considerations which establish whether I am talking sense, what I am referring to, how truth-values are to be assigned to my remarks, and so on, cannot be purely subjective considerations. If we are to talk about mental objects, in other words, they cannot be intrinsically or essentially disconnected from physical and bodily ones. We have here a condensation rather than an expansion of the argument of § 256 – 258, but one which nevertheless throws light upon the general thrust of the argument.

#### § 260. Can the diarist believe that the sensation S has recurred?

“Well, I *believe* that this is the sensation S again.” – Perhaps you *believe* that you believe it!

Then did the man who made the entry in the calendar make a note of *nothing whatever*? — Don't consider it a matter of course that a person is making a note of something when he makes a mark — say in a calendar. For a note has a function, and this "S" so far has none.

(One can talk to oneself. — If a person speaks when no one else is present, does that mean he is speaking to himself?)

It is very natural to misconstrue the nature of the difficulty confronted by the diarist by taking it to be epistemic in character. On this account what is amiss is that the diarist *has no means of knowing that, or cannot be quite sure whether* the S-like sensation which has just occurred again is or is not S. If this were Wittgenstein's point it would invite the response, "Does the diarist have to *know*: won't *belief* do just as well? (Doesn't our entire epistemic scheme, at the most basic levels, just have to be allowed to repose on belief in the general veracity of the senses, anyway?)"<sup>13</sup> All this is rolled up into the first sentence of § 260. Wittgenstein's terse response is, in effect, that the diarist cannot intelligibly be said to entertain the belief that sensation S has recurred unless he has some criterion which would allow him to differentiate between the recurrence and the non-recurrence of S. Lacking any such criterion, the most that can be said is that he *believes* that he believes that S has recurred; the evident epistemic vacuity of the framing belief-claim, now, makes the epistemic vacuity of the nested belief-claim evident. The diarist's problem is not an epistemic one, and so cannot be solved by lowering the epistemic stakes. One cannot entertain a belief unless one has some means of establishing its content. This the diarist could do if he had access to a criterion for distinguishing recurrences of S from non-recurrences of S. His problem (a non-epistemic one) is that he lacks any such criterion. The next objection is that the diarist was certainly aware of *something* in being aware of S, and that it was to that something that his note referred. Wittgenstein's response is that to speak of someone as "making a note of something" is only intelligible if the alleged note-taking operation has a function (one refers back to the note to discover the number of a safe-deposit box in which one has deposited some valuables, or something of the sort). The diarist's act of writing down S has no function: there is for instance no possible information that one could acquire, no possible useful purpose that could be served, by looking back at the diary later. This gives us a further sense, related but additional to, the one outlined in § 258, in which the diarist's procedure is nugatory. Wittgenstein's objector now falls back on the thought that "One can talk to oneself". The diarist is doing that by making his note, and therefore, presumably, *saying something* to himself. Wittgen-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Ayer (1954), pp. 63 — 94.

stein's answer is, in effect that one never "speaks to oneself" in the sense of *addressing* oneself, giving oneself information; so that cannot be the function of the diarist's utterance of the sign "S".<sup>14</sup>

§ 261. What grounds have we (or the diarist) for regarding "S" as the name of a sensation?

What reason have we for calling "S" the sign for a *sensation*? For "sensation" is a word of our common language, not of one intelligible to me alone. So the use of this word stands in need of a justification which everybody understands. — And it would not help either to say that it need not be a *sensation*; that when he writes "S", he has *something* — and that is all that can be said. "Has" and "something" also belong to our common language. — So in the end when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to make an inarticulate sound. — But such a sound is an expression only as it occurs in a particular language-game, which should now be described.

This is one of those paragraphs whose sense becomes markedly clearer when one realises that Wittgenstein's diarist is not only not a speaker but not even potentially a speaker of "our common language"; and that the conceptual difficulties which impede the diarist's attempt to name his sensation can be contrasted with the utter absence of such difficulties which allows the rest of us to name and discuss our sensations — our pains, say — with entire ease and facility. The difference is, of course, that because *for us* the relationship between sensation and its natural bodily expression retains its integrity, *we* possess the access to criteria for the distinction between correct and incorrect application of sensation-names which the diarist lacks. It is access to those criteria which allows us to give a type-characterisation of the referents of terms like "pain": to class such terms as *names for sensations*. Lacking access to any such criteria, what *kind of thing* can the diarist intelligibly claim to be attempting to name? He has, remember, no means of checking his belief that this "x", whatever it is, has recurred, and no means of describing it or characterising it verbally, except, perhaps, as a "something", which he "has". It is an ineffable thing: *pulvis, umbra, nihil*. Wittgenstein's conclusion, that "something" and "has" are "also words of our language", now follows pat. What is becoming clear, I think, is that Wittgenstein is not even talking about, let alone attempting to cast doubt upon, the possibility of *our* naming, referring to and discussing sensations, including pains. That *we* can do that goes without saying; is one of the premises of the argument. What is under attack is merely a certain philosophical picture — which

<sup>14</sup> Derrida offers, in *Speech and Phenomena* a very similar critique of a parallel move in Husserl's theory of signs.

leads to scepticism — of how we do it. It is in the attempt to save that picture — the Model of Association and Description — that “one gets to the point where one would just like to emit an inarticulate sound”.

#### § 262 — 263. The oddity of undertaking inwardly

It might be said: if you have given yourself a private definition of a word, then you must inwardly *undertake* to use the word in such-and-such a way. And how do you undertake that? Is it to be assumed that you invent the technique of using the word, or that you found it ready-made?

“But I can (inwardly) undertake to call THIS ‘pain’ in the future.” — “But is it certain that you have undertaken it? Are you sure that it was enough for this purpose to concentrate your attention on your feeling?” — A queer question. —

Having examined the diarist’s situation from the standpoint of the ineffable quiddity which the diarist is attempting to name, Wittgenstein now turns to the procedure, of attention-concentrating accompanied by utterance of a name, which the diarist hopes will permit him to fix a name to that quiddity. His opening point is that naming involves an undertaking to use the word in a certain way in future. The pattern of use in question may be learned from other speakers or invented by the diarist, but without some accompanying specification of a future pattern of use the diarist’s “undertaking” will be vacuous because empty of content. The implication is clear: as yet the diarist has specified no such pattern of use, and it is by no means clear how, given his situation, he could do so (cf. the middle paragraph of § 260). Wittgenstein’s imaginary interlocutor responds with the suggestion that the content of the diarist’s undertaking *is* simply his determination “to call THIS [the quiddity] ‘pain’ in the future”. But now it becomes a serious, and in principle quite unanswerable, question whether the act of attention-concentrating is sufficient to bring it about that the required undertaking has been made. And this is “ — A queer question — ”. It is “queer”, I take it, because on the one hand it is completely runcible (we have no notion whatsoever of what considerations could possibly contribute to either an affirmative or a negative answer to it); and because, on the other hand, it is not a question which arises for people like ourselves who, unlike the diarist, can fall back on the unbroken link between pain and its natural expression. In these, normal, circumstances *what* someone has undertaken to call “pain”, and *that* he or she has undertaken it, becomes clear from the *use* he or she goes on to make of the word in actual contexts of discourse and action involving crying children, suspected and actual malingerers, stinging-nettles, and so on (this is part of the bearing of Wittgenstein’s well-known account of the concept of understanding in terms of “knowing how to go on”, of course). So the

question of whether the user's claim to have undertaken to use the word in a certain way *can be substantiated by appeal to the character of an original inward act of "undertaking"* never arises. It has to arise in the diarist's case, of course, because the diarist's situation does not allow him to specify for the sign "S" any pattern of future use in terms of which the correctness of his, or anyone's, understanding of the term could be assessed. But, just because of that, the question, once raised, turns out to be utterly imponderable: a "queer" question indeed, like asking whether Thursday is pink or blue; where, also, nothing constrains one to give either reply because nothing whatsoever of practical consequence hangs on the choice.

#### § 264. Reference and use

"Once you know *what* the word stands for, you understand it, you know its whole use."

Wittgenstein here formulates the philosophical claim which lies at the heart of our unwillingness to grant that any conceptual difficulties stand in the way of the diarist's successfully naming his sensation. The diarist *must* understand the meaning of the sign "S", because he *knows* (in terms of Russell's distinction is *acquainted with*) its referent, which simply stands naked before him, as it were, in his consciousness, and: "Once you know *what* the word stands for, you understand it, you know its whole use." This claim had also, of course, been central to Wittgenstein's own earlier theory of meaning. In the *Tractatus* the names in fully-analysed propositions are simply associated with "objects" whose *nature*, in the shape of their possibilities of combination into states of affairs, then determines the possibilities of *use* — the privileges of sentential occurrence — of the corresponding names. What the example of the diarist has shown is that this way of looking at things gets them back to front. It is the *uses* of names — not just their privileges of sentential occurrence, moreover, but their use in actual, concrete contexts of utterance, response and action, which must make clear the identity of their referents. Without the possibility of an appeal to *use* in that sense there can be no possibility either of identifying the referent of a name or of determining what undertaking has been made by the user of the name in respect of its future use; hence it is not, after all, conceptually possible to do as the diarist is attempting to do and leave it to the nature of the referent of a term to determine its use. § 264 thus sums up the series of exposures of muddles and incoherences accomplished in § 259 — 263 with a diagnosis of the origin of the perennial temptation we find ourselves under, as philosophical beings, to fall into those muddles. § 265 — 268 offer something different: a series of analogies which may help us to get a firmer hold upon just what it is that is

conceptually queer about the idea of an altogether private and internal process of naming of sensations, once the ordinary links between sensation and the bodily and physical have been severed.

§ 265 — 268. The dictionary, the newspaper, the clock, the bridge, the joke “gift.”

Let us imagine a table (something like a dictionary) that exists only in our imagination. A dictionary can be used to justify the translation of a word X by a word Y. But are we also to call it a justification if such a table is to be looked up only in the imagination? — “Well, yes; then it is a subjective justification.” — But justification consists in appealing to something independent. — “But surely I can appeal from one memory to another. For example, I don’t know if I have remembered the time of departure of a train right and to check it I call to mind how a page of the time-table looked. Isn’t it the same here?” — No; for this process has got to produce a memory which is actually *correct*. If the mental image of the time-table could not itself be *tested* for correctness, how could it confirm the correctness of the first memory? (As if someone were to buy several copies of the morning paper to assure himself that what it said was true.)

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.

I can look at the clock to see what time it is: but I can also look at the dial of a clock in order to *guess* what time it is; or for the same purpose move the hand of a clock till its position strikes me as right. So the look of a clock may serve to determine the time in more than one way. (Looking at the clock in the imagination.)

Suppose I wanted to justify the choice of dimensions for a bridge which I imagine to be building, by making loading tests on the material of the bridge in my imagination. This would, of course, be to imagine what is called justifying the choice of dimensions for a bridge. But should we also call it justifying an imagined choice of dimensions?

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

The principle governing all these illustrations seems to me to be the one enunciated at the outset in § 265: “justification consists in appealing to something independent.” The diarist’s problem is that there is nothing independent to which he can appeal to establish the correctness or incorrectness of any subsequent application of “S”. This is clearly a quite general and essential feature of his condition. Lacking any essential connection with the body or the physical world both his “sensations” (if, *vide* § 261, we can even call them that) and his conviction that they recur identically amount to purely subjective impressions. Adrift on a phantom tide of hunches and intimations, the diarist can justify a judgement about

the correctness of one subjective impression only by appeal to other subjective impressions; but what ground has he for taking *those* to be correct? He is like the man who can check his memory of a train time only by looking it up in an imaginary time-table<sup>15</sup>, the man who buys two copies of the morning newspaper to see whether what the first one said was true, the man who attempts to work out engineering tolerances by making imaginary loading tests. These transactions are futile in just the way that a gift of money by my right hand to my left would be futile, because it would not have “the further practical consequences” of a gift. (In the same way the diarist’s “name-bestowing” would not have the “further practical consequences” which the bestowal of a name ordinarily has.) I can conjure up the face of a clock in my imagination as part of the process of guessing the time, but I cannot *read off* the time from an imaginary clock-face.

§ 269 A possible sense for the expressions “private language”,  
“subjective understanding”

Let us remember that there are certain criteria in a man’s behaviour for the fact that he does not understand a word: that it means nothing to him, that he can do nothing with it. And criteria for his “thinking he understands”, attaching some meaning to the word, but not the right one. And, lastly, criteria for his understanding the word right. In the second case one might speak of a subjective understanding. And sounds which no one else understands but which I ‘*appear to understand*’ might be called a “private language.”

Wittgenstein’s point here is that the expressions by appeal to which his interlocutor has repeatedly tried to make sense of the idea that the diarist understands the meaning of “S”, expressions such as “subjective understanding”, “private language”, are expressions which *could* be given meaning: but that giving them a meaning would involve specifying criteria for distinguishing between their correct and incorrect application. In the case of the diarist, who lacks access to such criteria, not even expressions like “fails to understand” or “thinks he understands” can find any foothold.

Wittgenstein now turns, in the culminating paragraph of the private language argument, to the question of what sort of criteria might allow the diarist, if he had access to them, to name his sensations.

<sup>15</sup> Ayer’s argument, in “Can there be a private language?”, to the effect that my confidence that the real timetable says what it says “must in the end rest on the testimony of the senses” (on the basis of which Kripke (1982), p. 62 n. once thought “that the [private language] argument *could* not be right”) seems to me either (true, but) irrelevant, or a *petitio principii*, depending upon whether one interprets the phrase “the testimony of the senses” in a phenomenalist or a realistic spirit.

## § 270. The manometer

Let us now imagine a use for the entry of the sign “S” in my diary. I discover that whenever I have a particular sensation a manometer shews that my blood-pressure rises. So I shall be able to say that my blood-pressure is rising without using any apparatus. This is a useful result. And now it seems quite indifferent whether I have recognised the sensation *right* or not. Let us suppose I regularly identify it wrong, it does not matter in the least. And that alone shews that the hypothesis that I make a mistake is mere show. (We as it were turned a knob which looked as if it could be used to turn on some part of the machine; but it was a mere ornament, not connected with the mechanism at all.)

And what is our reason for calling “S” the name of a sensation here? Perhaps the kind of way this sign is employed in this language-game. — And why a “particular sensation,” that is, the same one every time? Well, aren’t we supposing we write “S” every time?

Wittgenstein here returns to the problem which I raised, in the capacity of devil’s advocate for the sceptic, in my discussion of § 258. If the conceptual difficulties under which the diarist labours are supposed to stem from his lack of access to criteria of correct application for sensation-words, then should not we also, even granted the integrity, in our case, of the normal link between pain and its “natural expression”, find ourselves in just the same plight as the diarist? For how can one, for instance, seriously hope to ground the correctness of a judgement to the effect that THIS sensation is relevantly similar to S upon the mere fact that both THIS sensation and S make me want to cry out? — Doesn’t it remain perfectly possible that both S and THIS might have that effect on me and yet be, qualitatively speaking, entirely different sensations? And isn’t it also possible that that qualitative difference might remain unnoticed by me, so that I might be mistaken in thinking THIS the same as S even in the case where I have access to the “ordinary criteria” made accessible by the integrity of the normal link between pain and its natural expression? And if these possibilities really do remain open and unresolved by appeal to Wittgenstein’s “ordinary criteria”, then, since we clearly can and do name and talk about our sensations, must we not conclude that the private language argument is faulty and that the Model of Association and Description must, after all, give a substantially correct account of how we manage to do that?

§ 270 answers this objection. The introduction of the manometer restores a connection between the diarist’s sensations and the physical world; and with it the possibility of grounding judgements concerning the sameness and difference of sensations in the kind of justification which, as we remember from § 265, “consists in appealing to something independent”. The “something independent” in the case is provided by the causal connection between the physiological phenomena producing the sensation



and a concomitant rise in blood-pressure, revealed by the manometer. If I can learn, by noting the presence of the sensation, to predict whether my blood-pressure is rising without using the manometer, this will be “a useful result”.

In order to learn to do this I shall, of course, use the manometer readings to educate myself into acquiring a “feel” or “nose” for the crucial sensation *S*. For a time I may get confused by my inability to distinguish with complete certainty, on every occasion, between *S* and other superficially similar sensations *S'*, *S''*. This would have posed an insuperable difficulty were I still in the situation of the diarist of § 258, for in his situation I should have no means of checking upon the adequacy of my “feel” for such fine qualitative differences between sensations. Where there are *only* subjective impressions, indeed, we cannot speak of “qualitative differences”, fine or coarse, and hence not even of “sensations”. But, fortunately, I am now in a position to check my judgements of relative similarity between sensations against the manometer readings. As time goes by the resulting regular exposure of my judgments to positive and negative feedback so sharpens my sense of the phenomenal differences which distinguish *S* from *S'* and *S''* that I become able to predict the rise of the manometer, without looking at it to check, in every case without exception: my doctor, after testing out my now remarkable abilities in this respect, says “Good work! Now you will know exactly when to take your tablet.”

Enter now the philosophical sceptic, armed with a possibility which, seemingly, my doctor has not considered. Suppose, despite the predictive prowess which the possibility of an “appeal to something independent” provided by the manometer has enabled me to acquire, the qualitative character of *S* has actually been changing constantly, so that each time I have experienced “it”, and marked the occurrence by noting down “*S*” in my diary, I have actually experienced a qualitatively different sensation? The first half of Wittgenstein’s clinching point, now, is, in effect, that were the sceptic to raise with my doctor the alleged difficulty presented by this putative possibility, my doctor would be being entirely reasonable in replying that there would be no *point* in introducing further measures to exclude this possibility, since it makes no *practical* difference whatsoever to the situation. Provided, that is, I base my predictions of the manometer’s behaviour on the recurrence of a sensation which *seems to me* qualitatively identical with the sensation whose occurrence has always in the past coincided with the rise in blood-pressure indicated by the manometer, and provided my predictions, so guided, are, as they are, one hundred per cent accurate, every *practical* purpose of the procedure is very adequately served;

so that from a practical point of view we can afford to leave it undetermined whether the possibility the sceptic envisages is realised or not.

So far so good. This is still only half the story, however. The second half of Wittgenstein's clinching point against the sceptic is, in effect, that there is no way in which my doctor could, even if he wanted to and *even in principle*, introduce any further practical measure to exclude the possibility the sceptic envisages. For the variations in the qualitative character of S which the sceptic envisages are *ex hypothesi* (given the terms of *the sceptic's* hypothesis, that is) not variations which could ever come to my notice. They are *ex hypothesi* what bring it about that I am mistaken in my belief that a qualitatively unchanging S recurs. Evidently I could only discover my error if I possessed the possibility of some "appeal to something independent" analogous to the one which has, in the event, allowed me to correct my former tendency to confuse S with S' and S". But if any such possibility of independent appeal were to exist, my difficulty would be a purely practical one; that is to say, it would not be a difficulty of the type characteristic of philosophical scepticism. But if there is, as the sceptic must claim if the possibility he is touting is to remain a *sceptical* possibility, no means whereby, even in principle, I could discover my mistake, then where, as Wittgenstein very reasonably asks, is the sense in supposing that I *make* a mistake? Must we not conclude that "the hypothesis that I make a mistake is mere show"? That the sceptic's alleged "possibility" is like a knob on a machine which looks as if turning it would produce a practical result, but which is in fact simply not connected up to the inner mechanism of the machine?

It is important to notice that what is lapsing into conceptual vacuity here is not pain, or the possibility of reference to sensations, or the distinction between consciousness and behaviour, but the sceptic's hypothesis that even when I have acquired the ability to predict the behaviour of the manometer perfectly by appeal to the occurrence of a sensation S which *seems to me* qualitatively identical each time it recurs, S might "really" be qualitatively quite different from occurrence to occurrence. Wittgenstein's strategy is in effect, to put pressure on the sceptic's "really": if the alleged changes in the qualitative character of S are systematically undiscoverable by the person whose sensory experience they allegedly characterise, and if they make no practical difference to his ability to predict the behaviour of the manometer, in what sense can they be said to be "really" occurring at all? Let us, then, delete from consideration, on grounds of vacuity, the sceptic's claim that I may be making a mistake about the identity of S, together with the postulated changes in the qualitative character of S whose putative possibility serves to sustain that claim. What are we left with? We have been carried by the argument out of the toils

of scepticism and deposited back where we began, sitting once more in the grey Monday-morning world we left when we first tasted the febrile excitements of philosophical doubt, confronting the following prosaic and drably un-philosophical description of the situation: I can predict rises in my own blood-pressure by observing, and noting down in a diary the occurrence of a sensation which I call "S". Notice that one of the ways in which such a description is drably un-philosophical is that it is not a *behaviouristic* description of the state of affairs it describes, but a description which involves essential reference to sensations. It is, that is, the occurrence of a *sensation*, S, which allows me to predict the behaviour of the manometer: no sensation, no prediction. The sceptic might insinuate here that, perhaps, I feel no sensation; that my claim to experience one may be well-sustained pretence; that the predictions just come into my head, as numbers do into that of an idiot savant. But then, since I am sincerely anxious that my doctor should have any information which might conceivably advance my cure, it would be odd if I were either to initiate or continue with such a pretence (what could possibly explain such behaviour, in an actual situation?). The only insinuation seriously open to the sceptic is that perhaps I am systematically mistaking the qualitative character of S; and that suggestion, as we have seen, fails on grounds of vacuity. So my doctor and I really are talking, and talking rather seriously, and for urgently practical purposes, about my sensations. The language in which we are talking about them thus could not be, and is not, a "private language" in the philosophical sense: one in which names for sensations have meanings accessible only to one person. By the same token, the sensations of mine which my doctor and I are so seriously discussing are not private sensations, any more than pain is a private sensation. I shall no doubt have much to say about the location and qualitative character of S, once, thanks to the possibility of referring to the manometer to check the accuracy of my "feel" for it, I have it securely phenomenally singled out from other sensations. My doctor will have gathered similar descriptions from other patients with the same condition, so that when later in life he himself acquires my heart condition he will acquire with it the opportunity to experience for himself *the very sensation* which I now experience and call "S".

Hence it appears that Wittgenstein has provided himself, through the private language argument, with a perfect right to insist, both that sensations are public, and not (*pace* the entire Cartesian tradition down to the present day) private objects of reference,

§ 275. Look at the blue of the sky and say to yourself "How blue the sky is!" — When you do it spontaneously — without philosophical intentions — the idea

never crosses your mind that this impression of colour belongs only to *you*. And you have no hesitation in exclaiming that to someone else.

and that he is not a behaviourist:

§ 304. “But you will surely admit that there is a difference between pain-behaviour accompanied by pain and pain-behaviour without any pain?” — Admit it? What greater difference could there be?

The rout of scepticism and behaviourism, the radical reintegration of our humanity with the natural, pre-philosophical world, has only been accomplished, however, by insisting upon the integrity of relationships between sensation and behaviour, the mental and the bodily, which we ordinarily take for granted, but which Cartesian-style scepticism covertly smuggles out of sight as a condition for commencing its operations.

§ 281. But doesn't what you say come to this: that there is no pain, for example, without *pain-behaviour*? — It comes to this: only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious.

That these relationships ordinarily obtain is, of course, just a blank empirical matter of fact. That such facts obtain, however, grounds the possibility of our language containing vocabularies of terms offering certain specific possibilities of *meaning*. It follows that language is not simply the neutral mirror of nature that it appeared in the *Tractatus*, its basic terms connected merely by conventional association with the most metaphysically basic elements of reality and its “grammar”, its logical articulations, determined by the nature of those elements. For the Wittgenstein of the *Investigations*, what categories of referents the terms of our language pick out, and what the grammar of the corresponding terms turns out to be, depends on a wide variety of contingent facts about our phenomenal situation in the world, such as, for instance, the fact that pain makes one cry out unless by an act of will one suppresses the impulse. It has often been supposed that the rules which govern meaning must be at some basic level a matter of laying down *purely stipulative definitions*: definitions specifying arbitrary associations of proper names with individuals, arbitrary stipulations of truth- and satisfaction-conditions, and so on. This is, in effect, what Wittgenstein is denying at § 242:

If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments. This seems to abolish logic, but does not do so.

It does not do so because logic can still “look after itself”: there can still be a purely descriptive investigation of the way in which language relates to reality which in no way disturbs or “theorises” that relationship; which “leaves everything as it stands”. The investigation of reference and truth

as the linked points of juncture between language and reality undertaken in the *Tractatus* becomes in the *Investigations* the investigation of the conditions for reference and truth in natural, rather than formalised or pseudo-formalised languages, and of how those conditions go to ground, at the point at which “the spade turns” in “agreements in judgment”. This new vision of the relationship between language is at the heart of the later Wittgenstein’s treatment of scepticism, and of criteria. To these vexed topics I shall now, briefly, turn in conclusion.

#### 4. *Scepticism and Rules*

At § 288 Wittgenstein considers the case of someone who says “Oh, I know what ‘pain’ means; what I don’t know is whether *this*, that I have now, is pain.” After noting that we should, confronted with this, “merely shake our heads and be forced to regard his words as a queer reaction which we have no idea what to do with”, Wittgenstein continues,

That expression of doubt has no place in the language-game; but if we cut out human behaviour, which is the expression of sensation, it looks as if I might *legitimately* begin to doubt afresh. My temptation to say that one might take a sensation for something other than what it is arises from this: if I assume the abrogation of the normal language-game with the expression of a sensation, I need a criterion of identity for the sensation; and then the possibility of error also exists.

This passage, besides providing additional confirmation of the essential correctness of the interpretation of the private language argument offered in the preceding section, contains the core of Wittgenstein’s diagnosis of what is wrong with scepticism. A well-constituted language-game must be so constituted as to allow its users the in-principle possibility of settling questions about the truth or falsity of the sentences it licenses which arise in the course of operating it. This principle is the later Wittgenstein’s version of the Fregean dictum that to understand the meaning of a sentence is to know how to set about establishing its truth or falsity, of course. This possibility is, however, guaranteed, not by an original act of association connecting each basic name of the language with its referent, and not, either, by a stipulative “rule of language” specifying (by a “mental act”, or a diagram, or a verbal formula, for instance) how the name is to be used, but by a *way of acting*<sup>16</sup> in concrete circumstances of discourse. This way of acting is, further, sustained by the obtaining of some set of contingent facts about human life. Thus one way of settling the issue of whether someone is really in pain or malingering is to put him in circum-

<sup>16</sup> Cf. OC § 206.

stances in which he needs to cease giving an impression of someone incapacitated by pain if he is to secure goals important to him, and in which he thinks he can do this safely. What makes this an intelligible way of going about the business of settling the epistemic issue is, of course the natural fact about human beings that a human being who is really in great pain finds it impossible to continue going about his or her business as if nothing were wrong, for reasons which, if we really need the lesson, we can all discover for ourselves. Someone shows that he understands the meaning of the word “pain”, now, by accepting the epistemic appropriateness of such a strategy, and by showing that he understands, also, the nature of the surrounding natural circumstances which make it, epistemically, an appropriate strategy.

The doubts characteristic of philosophical scepticism are, now, doubts in principle incapable of resolution. They have, therefore, “no place in the language-game”, for the simple reason that, if a language-game left the possibility of such doubts open, it would not conform to the requirements of the late-Wittgensteinian version of Frege’s Dictum, mentioned above. It would not yet, that is, be a *playable* language game: the meanings of the verbal expressions entering into it would not yet have been established. If we encounter sceptical doubts while retaining a strong sense of what it is that makes our ordinary language-game playable, then they often do seem completely imponderable. This is the case, for instance, with Wittgenstein’s interlocutor who claims to know what “pain” means but nevertheless to doubt whether what he feels *now* is pain (if he really does *know* what pain means, then, given what it does mean, how could he possibly doubt *that?*). The sceptic has a standard strategy, however, for making his doubts seem legitimate. It is covertly to abrogate “the normal language game”; to put out of sight, as it were, the natural conditions which bring it about under ordinary circumstances that Frege’s Dictum is satisfied. By adopting the standard Cartesian doctrine of the essential distinctness of mind and the physical world, he abrogates the possibility of resolving issues of truth or falsity arising within the language game by appeal to all those ordinary linkages between sensation, the body and the physical, of whose silent, sustaining presence at our elbow, as it were, Wittgenstein painstakingly reminds us. Having abrogated all that, the sceptic has abrogated everything which, under ordinary circumstances, supplies us with criteria of identity for sensations and sensation-types. So “I need [“lack”, or “stand in need of” would be other possible translations of *brauche ich*, I take it] a criterion of identity.” But now, in the altered circumstances created for me by the sceptic’s tactical abrogations, I cannot have one, for — here the sceptic’s trap is finally sprung — there is no possibility of finding one. And now the possibility of extraordinary and

imponderable errors — of mistaking pain for some other kind of sensation entirely, for instance — appears really to exist.

The general nature of Wittgenstein's strategy for dealing with scepticism follows from the general nature of his diagnosis and will now, I think, be plain enough. It is to insist on the sceptic *himself* accepting the consequences of the abrogations (of the possibility of those appeals to natural facts which allow sentences framed in terms of the words on the constancy of whose application the sceptic wishes to throw doubt to meet, under ordinary circumstances, the requirements of Frege's Dictum) which make the doubts he wishes to insinuate appear legitimate. The sceptic's view of the matter is that to abrogate the ordinary context of the language-game is to allow the possibility of extraordinary doubts to come into view. Wittgenstein's retort, in effect, is that to abrogate the ordinary context of the language-game is to evacuate of meaning, to render senseless, the very words upon whose continued meaningfulness the sceptic must rely if he is to be able to formulate the extraordinary doubts in question. This is the burden of Wittgenstein's discussion in § 261, for instance. Has the diarist (whose situation is devised to conform to the Cartesian sceptic's description of our situation) any grounds left for giving any characterisation at all of the meaning of "S"; even the minimal one involved in characterising "S" as the name of a *sensation*? And it is the burden of the famous "beetle-in-a-box" discussion at § 293. (Wittgenstein's point here is that if the referents of names for sensations did not possess criteria of identity established by their *use* in concrete circumstances involving "the normal language-game with the expression of a sensation" it would be possible to "divide through by" them as it is to divide through by "the thing in the box".<sup>17</sup>)

Wittgenstein thus presents the sceptic with a dilemma. On the one hand the sceptic has the option of remaining within the terms of the language-game as that is ordinarily played, with the ordinary possibilities of appeal to the natural boundary-conditions which render it playable. In that case the conditions for the satisfaction of Frege's Dictum will continue to be met, with the consequence that, although many doubts will arise in the course of playing the game, and some no doubt remain for practical reasons unresolved, no *in principle irresolvable* doubts will arise. Or, on the other hand the sceptic has the option of abrogating the boundary-conditions of the language-game. But then the conditions of satisfaction of Frege's Dictum will no longer be met, with the result that terms (such as

<sup>17</sup> PI § 293: "... The thing in the box has no place in the language game at all; not even as a *something*; for the box might even be empty. — No, one can "divide through" by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is."

“sensation”) upon whose meaningfulness the sceptic needs to rely in order to frame his sceptical possibilities will lapse into meaninglessness, plunging into vacuity the sceptical possibilities defined in terms of them (for example the possibility that even when I have acquired a sufficient feel for the qualitative character of S to predict the behaviour of the manometer exactly, I might still be mistaking the qualitative character of S from occasion to occasion). Across the invisible boundary thus defined between everyday life (untouched by sceptical doubt) and sceptical doubt (accompanied by the instant dissolution into senselessness of the language which the sceptic needs to rely upon if he is to express his doubts), the sceptic can now safely be left to ricochet back and forth to his heart’s content.

I turn now to Kripke, and to Wittgenstein’s alleged “sceptical paradox.” The paradox is supposed to be that I have no means of determining whether my present use of “+” to mean addition (rather than a different, and amusingly Goodmanesque function “quus”) conforms to my past practice in the matter, since “no fact about my past history — nothing that was ever in my mind, or in my external behaviour — establishes that I meant plus rather than quus”.<sup>18</sup> Kripke’s Calculator is thus in a situation precisely parallel to that of the diarist of PI § 258. Each needs, or seems to need, some means of connecting his past with his present; each has excellent reason to murmur uneasily to himself [PI § 288], “*Ich brauche nun ein Kriterium der Identität*”; in the case of the diarist a criterion of the identity of a past and a present sensation, and in that of the calculator a criterion of the identity of the meaning of “+” in a past use with its meaning in a present use. Kripke engagingly admits in advance, what Baker and Hacker turn into an accusation, that the “plus”-sceptic’s doubts contain the seeds of linguistic nihilism: “Of course, ultimately, if the sceptic is right, the concepts of meaning and intending one function rather than another will make no sense.”<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein, if we have read him aright, would heartily concur with this; but he would also add that it creates a problem not just for the Kripkean Calculator but for the Kripkean sceptic. Kripke, laying out “the ground rules of our formulation of the problem”, says this: “For the sceptic to converse with me at all, we must have a common language.”<sup>20</sup> How can that requirement be satisfied if I cannot be sure — as I cannot if the sceptic’s doubts have weight — whether the sceptic’s terms “plus” and “quus” pick out plus and quus or two of infinitely many other possible arithmetical functions? How can I even be sure that they pick out arithmetical functions? (Cf. PI § 261)

<sup>18</sup> Kripke (1982), p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Kripke, *loc. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Kripke (1982), p. 11 — 12.



Wittgenstein's way out of the problems raised by Kripke's sceptic would (again, if we have read him correctly) be to avoid getting into them into the first place. They arise because of the sceptic's demand for a *guarantee* that he is proceeding correctly (i.e., in accord with his former usage) in taking "+" to mean plus and because of his further demand that there be some "fact" which provides such a guarantee. But — arguing now in parallel with Wittgenstein's treatment of the diarist of § 258 — no "fact", whether about a "mental state", an "undertaking", a "rule of language", or whatever, could provide such a guarantee. What provides grounds for the judgment that by "+" I mean plus, now or in the past, is that I count, add, subtract and in general perform arithmetical computations either in just the same way as other people or, to cover the case where I have access to idiosyncratic computational procedures, in ways which come to the same thing. The man who knows what "pain" means *both* accepts the epistemic relevance to the issue of whether A is really in pain of discovering whether A goes on behaving like that even when his affairs manifestly require his attention, *and* gives explanations of why he takes that to be epistemically relevant which match ours. Similarly, the man who knows what "+" means shows that *both* by working out addition sums in ways which give the right answer, *and* by explaining, in ways which show that he has grasped the ordinary *rationale* of addition, why he considers those methods epistemically sound ones.

What the man who wants to manifest his knowledge of the meaning of "+" will *not* do, however, if he wishes to retain the confidence of his hearers, is to offer any version of Kripke's "sceptical solution". He will not, that is, just mutter defensively that his methods, and the results he has obtained by them, have always met with the approval of other members of his society. For, on the one hand, everyone he meets might be as slipshod in matters of addition as he is himself (perhaps this is why the new church tower leans sideways and has all its angles out of true). And, on the other hand, the web of arithmetical *practices* into which the concept of addition fits provides a criterion of correctness for applications of the term "+" which renders the criterion of community approval both superfluous and beside the point (Robinson Crusoe might have invented trigonometry to survey his island and made use of it in entire solitude with complete success, that is). If it did not, after all, the requirements of Wittgenstein's version of Frege's Dictum would not be met for "+", with the result that "+" would have (as yet) no meaning. The fact that "if everything can be made out to accord with a rule [on some interpretation] then it can also be made out to conflict with it" [PI§ 201] does not, in other words, pitch us automatically into social relativism, since "there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not an interpretation*, but which is exhibited

in what we call “obeying the rule” and “going against it” in actual cases”. Kripke, it must be said, makes only the most modest claims for his views as an interpretation of Wittgenstein, and their deficiencies as that have perhaps been worked over quite enough in recent discussion. Still, I think sufficient textual evidence for the general adequacy of the foregoing as a (necessarily brief) sketch of Wittgenstein’s stance with respect to the social relativist is offered by the following:

§ 241. “So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?” — It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.

### 5. *Criteria, Reference and Truth*

By way of postscript or appendix it seems worth adding a few brief comments on Wittgenstein’s use of the term “criterion”. The term has raised bitter exegetical controversy, which Baker and Hacker sum up as follows:

Philosophers have notoriously found difficulty in making sense of Wittgenstein’s remarks about criteria. The crucial problem is to explain how an internal relation can be defeasible. Defeasibility amounts to the absence of any entailment, while an internal relation must be a necessary connection. Can there be necessary connections that fall short of entailment? Again, evidence is typically held to render a proposition certain if and only if it confers upon it the degree of probability of 1. But philosophers have commonly thought that only entailment confers the probability of 1 upon a hypothesis. Yet Wittgenstein suggests that undefeated criterial support renders the proposition supported certain. How can this be?<sup>21</sup>

How, indeed? The difficulty of finding an answer must surely suggest either, implausibly, that Wittgenstein’s thought was slipshod to the point of random assertion, or that the Wittgenstein who needs to find answers to these questions is the creation of his interpreters. The second solution seems to me the most likely one. Wittgenstein’s uses of the term “criterion” are so numerous and so various in their contexts that it would require a far longer essay than this to discuss them all adequately. From the use Wittgenstein makes of the term in the restricted context of the private language argument, however, one or two useful pointers do emerge. The first concerns the question of what the function of “criteria” is supposed to be. What are they supposed to be criteria *of*, exactly? The general assumption has been that they are criteria for the truth of statements: that Wittgenstein’s answer to scepticism about pain is that pain-behaviour

<sup>21</sup> Baker and Hacker (1984), p. 111.

offers a sufficient criterion of truth for the assertion that the person who exhibits it is actually in pain. This, of course, is to force Wittgenstein to answer the Cartesian sceptic on the sceptic's own terms. Not surprisingly, the answer appears very weak, and raises all the consequent questions which Baker and Hacker list. It seems clear, however, both textually and from the analysis of the structure and implications of the private language argument offered in the preceding two sections, that when Wittgenstein uses the term in that context what he has in mind is not a criterion of truth, but a criterion of identity [*Kriterium der Identität*]. The kind of thing he has in mind as fulfilling the role of such a criterion is, moreover, not a *statement*, or any sort of stipulative "rule of language" (indeed, not a linguistic entity at all), and not a piece of behaviour, either; but rather some more or less complicated *relationship* between the words we use, the practices in the context of which we use them, and the natural facts about the world and ourselves which make those practices useful and intelligible to us. When such a relationship is in place, certainly, we are in a position to identify for one another's benefit the referents of our terms, and to determine what considerations are relevant to assessing the truth and falsity, in context, of the sentences into which they enter. But criteria [of identity] are what render our remarks intelligible, not what render them true, or confer certainty upon them. Of course, Wittgenstein is arguing that the possession of adequate criteria of identity, for pain, say, excludes the intelligibility of *sceptical* doubt. And the possibilities of substantial doubt (the kind that arises "in the context of the language-game") are such that under many ordinary circumstances our enquiries into whether someone is in pain are apt to terminate in that direction rather rapidly, unless impeded from doing so by sceptical doubts of the kind Wittgenstein holds to be vacuous. In the presence of a child screaming because its foot has been blown off by an anti-personnel bomb, I shall not waste much time in concluding that it is in pain, and if anyone asks me whether I have adequately considered the possibility that the child may be a little automaton, I shall very probably hit him. Thus also Wittgenstein in PI § 303:

Just try — in a real case — to doubt someone else's fear or pain.

The child's pain, then, *pace* the Cartesian tradition, is "beyond doubt", and is thus, in that limited sense, no doubt, "known to me with certainty". But what has put it beyond doubt is not my possession of some marvellous Wittgensteinian nostrum called a "criterion", related to the child's pain by a defeasible internal relation which gives to the evidential relationship connecting the child's overt behaviour with its inner states the force of an entailment, but simply the fact that the limited resources of non-vacuous doubt in the actual situation confronting me have run out! In

such a situation, as Wittgenstein argues in § 303, one could choose, indeed, to weaken “know” to “believe”, or for that matter, replace “It is true that the child is in pain” with “The child’s behaviour warrants the assertion that it is in pain”, but these changes would themselves be barren of practical effect, would mark no *caveat* or reservation having any practical bearing on the situation. Of course it is “logically possible”, as philosophers like to say, that the child might turn out after all to be a hologram or an automaton; but that can hardly affect the force of the only judgement which counts here: that, *if* he is the perfectly ordinary, smelly, terrified little boy which five seconds of Austinian verification<sup>22</sup> suffice to reveal him to be, *then* he is in pain. That five-second survey of the situation completed, the putative possibilities of error constituted by holograms, automata and the like collapse into “mere show”, ornaments rather than control-knobs, like the possibilities of continued error canvassed by the sceptic of § 270.

In short, we might get further towards an understanding of what Wittgenstein meant by “criterion” if we were to drop the idea that it is immediately intelligible what is involved in the claim that a statement is true or false, or that a name refers. Wittgenstein’s leading thought in the *Investigations*, it seems to me, is that the intelligibility of such claims is never self-evident, but depends in each case in which it is raised upon the accessibility of appropriate criteria, of an appropriate and generally understood way of relating words to practices, and practices to background conditions. Only in the context of such a relationship can we identify what a name picks out, or what considerations are relevant to the truth of an assertion.

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf J. L. Austin (1962), Lecture X. I am thinking in particular of Austin’s attack, on pp. 117 – 123, upon Ayer’s claim that no physical-object statement is conclusively verifiable.