

The Private Language Argument: Another Footnote to Plato?

Arnold Cusmariu

Abstract: A valid and arguably sound private language argument is built using premises based on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* augmented by familiar analytic distinctions and concepts of logic. The private language problem and the solution presented here can be plausibly traced to Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Both literatures missed the connection.

Keywords: Plato, Wittgenstein, epistemic privacy, following a rule, outward criteria, type-token distinction, substitution theorem.

I. Coming Full Circle

The story how this article came to be written may be of interest to some readers. Those who do not wish to travel down memory lane with me can skip ahead.

In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant famously wrote:

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer.

The question that 'burdened' me since learning geometry in middle school that I was 'not able to ignore' but that 'transcended my powers to answer' was a practical one: How do mathematical proofs work? I had to do them in school and, like other students, sometimes I got it right and sometimes I didn't. So, what did I do well in one case but not the other? My teachers did not explain. They would only tell us when we got it right and when not. Logic was not taught as a subject in its own right.¹ In fact, I didn't even know there was such a subject until very much later. When I asked a mathematics professor in college to explain the concept of mathematical proof, he answered that the question was not mathematical but philosophical. I changed majors.

On to Philosophy!

Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy by a neo-Kantian, Leonard Nelson – a book I happened across in a Dover Publications catalog – confirmed that I had made the

¹ I'm hoping that my book *Logic for Kids: All Aboard the **Therefore** Train*, Jenny Stanford Publishing (forthcoming) will change that situation. This is the book I wish I'd had when I was ten.

right decision. Philosophy asked fascinating questions, some of which seemed familiar for some reason. However, it was the challenges and allure of Ludwig Wittgenstein's oracular *Tractatus Logicus-Philosophicus* that got me hooked.

- Proposition 1.1 informed the reader that “the world is the totality of facts, not of things.” Well and good but a totality is a set, which raises questions (a) how membership is to be determined and (b) whether reality was an abstraction of some sort because sets are abstract. But then, maybe I was wrong to understand ‘totality’ in mathematical terms.
- Proposition 1.1 also seemed to imply that Genesis ontology was wrong: that in the beginning, God created not things like heaven and Earth as the Bible asserted but rather facts! Here was a philosopher, and an obscure one at that (at the time), challenging a basic tenet of the most famous and influential book in the world, read and taken literally by millions for centuries. In olden times, such daring would have been considered a capital offense and punished accordingly.
- I thought Proposition 2 should have read “What is the case – a fact – is the *occurrence* of states of affairs,” distinguishing *existence* from *occurrence*. After all, apples and oranges *exist* (ghosts and unicorns don't) but events and states of affairs *occur* (or don't). Such sentences as “the apple is red” and “the apple is red and not red” are both meaningful, hence states of affairs correspond to them but only one can occur.
- Are there facts as well as states of affairs according to Proposition 2; or is Proposition 2 a definition of ‘fact,’ reducing facts to states of affairs? Hmm...
- I thought Proposition 2.0123, “If I know an object, I also know all its possible occurrences in states of affairs” entailed skepticism because we can't know all possible occurrences of an object in states of affairs.
- What does ‘objects occur in a states of affairs’ mean, anyway?
- No doubt I was missing something. I had to keep reading to find out.

It was helpful that my teachers at the City College of New York, Michael Levin, Arthur Collins, Charles Evans, and Daniel Bronstein were sympathetic to Wittgenstein. I eventually read *Philosophical Investigations*, did well in my philosophy courses and was admitted to the Honors program in my senior year, which required writing a thesis. I produced “Verification as a Family Resemblance Concept,” a Wittgensteinian critique of positivist meaning in A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*. Levin supervised.

Armed with a *cum laude* degree with honors in philosophy, I had high hopes as I applied to Ivy League universities – Harvard, Princeton, Yale and Brown – to pursue graduate study. I also applied to the University of Oregon because Frank Ebersole, a Wittgensteinian Collins admired, taught there. Brown and Oregon accepted me. I decided on Brown, which proved to be a great decision indeed. It shaped my intellectual development in a variety of ways I did not appreciate at the time and also kept me out of the horrific mess known as the Vietnam War.

Providence must have persuaded the draft board official to sign off on my exemption. I was off to Providence, Rhode Island.

Philosophy at Brown University

I knew Roderick Chisholm taught at Brown but had not studied his books² and was unaware of his view that we have privileged access to our mental states in an epistemic sense, a view he shared with Descartes. When I raised Wittgenstein's well-known point at *Investigations* 246 that we can't be said to know that we are in pain, a student in the Chisholm seminar replied, dismissively: "That's just something Wittgenstein said."³ Yes, Wittgenstein did say that but 'just' implied that he had not given reasons for this view, which was false. I then wrote a paper for Chisholm explaining what I understood to be Wittgenstein's reasons. I wish I'd kept it! I did keep a paper I wrote for him titled "Are There Propositions?" and I'm glad I did. He made various comments in red pencil, including an extremely generous one for which I will be forever grateful: "Very good indeed – just the way a philosophical paper ought to be written." I took the advice to heart and have tried to follow it ever since.

I studied epistemology with Chisholm; philosophy of science with Sosa; Kant with Van Cleve; Hume with Lenz; logic with Luschei; philosophy of language with Swartz; and ethics with Brock. No seminars were offered on Wittgenstein, so the private language argument never came up.⁴ Vincent Tomas taught aesthetics, published on the subject (Tomas 1959), and had an interest in Wittgenstein. I wish I'd taken his seminar. I often wondered how (or whether) acquaintance with philosophical problems about art would have shaped my development as an artist years later. As it turned out, however, metaphysics and epistemology had a lot more to do with it.

In matters of method, Chisholm agreed with Plato that definitions were necessary if only to avoid pointless verbal disputes by making sure everyone was on the same page. Technical concepts were routine in science and mathematics, why not philosophy? This approach was a welcome antidote to the linguistic analysis promoted by Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, which regarded philosophical problems as something to be dissolved rather than solved, sort of like untying a knot – showing a fly a way out of the fly bottle, as Wittgenstein put it in passage 309.

Chisholm also agreed with Plato in matters of ontology. He accepted predicable universals such as properties and relations, drawing a sharp distinction between *existence* and *exemplification*. He also accepted non-predicable universals such as events and states of affairs, drawing a sharp

² *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* was published in 1957 and the first edition of *Theory of Knowledge* in 1966. The directly evident takes up Chapter 2 of *Theory of Knowledge*.

³ A Brown student before my time had a different take on this issue. See Canfield 1975.

⁴ Chisholm commented on the private language argument briefly in Hahn 1977, 27.

Arnold Cusmariu

distinction between *existing* and *occurring*. Brown helped me put the family resemblance model in the rear-view mirror, where it has stayed since.

Dissertation Time

I worked on the problem of universals for my dissertation, one of the oldest and most fundamental in philosophy, flirting initially with an Aristotelian solution – criticized later in Cusmariu 1979B – ultimately proposing a Platonist solution. The dissertation showed that an ancient problem, Plato’s ‘Third Man’ Argument (TMA), and a modern one, Russell’s Paradox (RP) – the property version of which I learned about from Chisholm – were opposite sides of the same coin: one was about self-predication, the other about non-self-predication. Accordingly, the same solution should handle both. How exactly that could be done was a lot of hard work, though intellectually very exciting.

I realized right away that Wittgensteinian approaches to TMA and RP were not an option. There was no way to ‘dissolve’ such complex and fundamental problems by examining ‘what we would say’ in the vernacular about self-predication and non-self-predication. These were technical concepts that seldom found their way in common parlance and as such provided scant usage data to analyze.⁵

Ah, if only Plato had pondered if there was a form exemplified by all and only forms that did not self-exemplify! On the other hand, Russell, who knew the history of philosophy very well indeed and was a Platonist at one time, nevertheless did not see the connection between RP and TMA. Had he seen it, he might have wondered if his theory of types also solved the TMA.⁶ His theory of descriptions wouldn’t have.

Lasting Impact

Platonism has been with me ever since. It had significant impact much later when I began making sculpture.⁷ I realized that a radically different approach to art, practically as well as theoretically, could be gleaned from Plato’s beautiful metaphor of *interweaving forms* in *Sophist*. Several articles explain my working aesthetic – Cusmariu 2009, 2015A and B, and 2017A and B – which could not have been written without the training I got at Brown. I take seriously Plato’s objections to art in Book X of *Republic* and strive to respond to them in my sculptures. I addressed these objections in Cusmariu 2016A.

⁵ See Cusmariu 1978, 1979A, and 1985 for expositions of key results of my dissertation.

⁶ Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* also failed to see the connection between TMA and RP. His knowledge of the history of philosophy was reportedly shaky, so it’s unlikely he was even aware of TMA. At *Tractatus* 3.333, Wittgenstein claims to have ‘disposed’ of the property (propositional function) version of RP. It is debatable whether his proposal ‘disposes’ of the set paradox. It does nothing to resolve the TMA.

⁷ The last section has a photo of a recent sculpture of mine.

So, here I am full circle, back to Wittgenstein, having followed in the meantime methodological guidelines set by Plato, with an assist from Chisholm.

II. Platonist Guidelines

We may infer from the sign that tradition says was displayed above the entrance to Plato's Academy, "Let None but Geometers Enter Here," that applicants were expected to possess significant reasoning skills acquired from study of mathematics, which they would need to apply to study philosophy. Four key elements were involved:

- **Defining a problem**

In geometry, this entailed formulating theorems about properties of points and lines, collected by Euclid in his *Elements*.

- **Motivating the problem**

The importance of theorems taken singly is determined by the contribution they make to enlarging the system's storehouse of knowledge.

- **Solving the problem**

Solving the problem means presenting a proof, which Euclid did for every theorem he listed.

- **Defending the solution**

Defending the proof entailed soundness and validity. Soundness is assumed to come from self-evident axioms. Validity is taken for granted because mathematics considers the logic of proofs to be self-evident (ha!) and as such not in need of elaboration. This has been true in mathematics since Euclid, whose *Elements* does not include what we now call proof theory, e.g., rules of inference and replacement and a substitution theorem. Logic has been a silent partner in mathematical pedagogy ever since (see Cusumariu 2016B.)

At Plato's Academy:

- **Defining the problem** meant asserting a significant thesis – e.g., that there was more to knowledge than true belief; that there was more to justice than self-interest; that art was a dangerous illusion; and so on – then formulating necessary and sufficient conditions for key concepts such as knowledge and justice that went beyond the merely stipulative definitions of geometry.

- As to **motivating philosophical problems**, the problem of universals, which Plato was the first to formulate, is one of the most fundamental problems in philosophy, cutting across virtually all fields of our discipline. His solution, the Theory of Forms, has profound implications.⁸

- To spell out a **problem-solving methodology**, Plato offered the hypothesis-refutation model and *reductio ad absurdum* form implicit in the Socratic Method, both as part of dialectic (see below) – the philosopher's tool box.

⁸ Succinct statements of the problem of universals and Plato's solution may be found in Cusumariu 1979.

Arnold Cusmariu

- As to **reasoned defense of solutions**, had Aristotle been a geometer – how did he get into the Academy? – he would have realized that his 15 valid categorical syllogisms in standard form, effectively rules of inference, are inadequate for the purpose of making dialectic logically explicit. Plato himself could do no better, alas. Some scholars believe he tried and failed.

Argumentation Impact

There are four counterparts in philosophical argumentation:

I: Formulating a proposition as the conclusion of an argument.

II: Motivating the philosophical significance of that proposition.

III: Listing premises claimed to logically support the conclusion.

IV: Showing that the argument is valid and that premises withstand scrutiny.

The TMA, which took dead aim at Plato's own Theory of Forms, satisfied the first three requirements remarkably well all things considered but requirement IV was a bridge too far that early in the history of logic, still too far even after Aristotle. Nevertheless, TMA defined an important dialectical requirement – taking a hard critical look at one's own theory – that philosophy has followed ever since. TMA also represents a technical innovation far ahead of its time, for which Plato has not been given credit, namely, that components of a system must form consistent set.⁹ We know now that proving consistency poses serious problems that, unfortunately, Euclid and mathematicians after him never even considered – until forced to do so by Frege, Russell and Whitehead.

III. Cutting to the Chase

Having set the stage with some admittedly unusual twists and turns, we are ready for passages associated with the private language argument (PLA) in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (PI). According to the literature, passages from 243 to 380 of PI contain material from which an argument can be assembled for the proposition that a private language is logically impossible.¹⁰ Restricted for the time being to sensations, the PLA can be cast as an argument of the following form:

W1. Theory T is true only if it is logically possible to refer to sensations by means of a private language.

⁹ TMA components that do not form a consistent set are: (1) there is a unique form of *F-ness* exemplified by all and only *F* objects; (2) all and only *F* objects are in the same class; (3) *F-ness* itself is an *F* object, and (4) *F-ness* itself is not in the class of all and only *F* objects. A resolution of the inconsistency is in Cusmariu 1980. Gilbert Ryle claimed in his 1939 article that exemplification leads to an infinite regress. This problem is solved in Cusmariu 1985.

¹⁰ Notable exceptions to this view are Baker 1998, Stroud 2000 and Canfield 2001.

The Private Language Argument: Another Footnote to Plato?

W2. It is logically possible to refer to sensations by means of a private language only if condition C can be satisfied.

W3. Condition C cannot be satisfied.

Therefore, by *modus tollens*,

W4. It is not logically possible to refer to sensations by means of a private language.

Therefore, by *modus tollens*,

W5. Theory T is false.

The PLA literature, which is vast and growing, has sought to explain:

- (a) what a private language is,
- (b) what privacy in general means,
- (c) what referring to sensations means,
- (d) what condition C might be,
- (e) whether condition C is necessary as claimed in W1,
- (f) whether condition C can be satisfied as contested in W2,
- (g) which answers to (a)-(f) are consistent with PI.¹¹

A thorough discussion of these matters is a book-length project. The best that I can do in this paper is to put together an argument using a minimum of assumptions based on the PI text, without claiming, however, that my PLA reconstruction necessarily represents Wittgenstein's intent. A brief Q&A section at the end addresses some problems with my minimalist reconstruction.

IV. Meeting Argumentation Requirements

Reconstruction of a PLA is the best that I can do because the PI text does not meet the argumentation requirements enunciated earlier.

Requirement I: Conclusion?

The proposition that a private language is logically impossible, which is considered to be the conclusion of a PLA, is not stated in PI passages that have been associated with the argument. That is, there is no German sentence in these passages that reads "eine private Sprache ist logisch unmöglich." While the phrase 'private language' (German, *private Sprache*) occurs several times, it does not occur as part of a sentence that expresses the proposition that a private language is logically impossible. Also absent is language that states, implies or even hints

¹¹ See Candish and Wrisley 2019.

Arnold Cusmariu

that such a proposition is to be the conclusion of an argument in the standard sense.

Requirement II: Motivation?

A useful way of becoming familiar with a scholarly work is to check the names of people and titles of books listed in the index.

- The only philosophers cited in PI are Augustine, Gottlob Frege, William James, Frank Ramsey, Bertrand Russell and Socrates (but not Plato). G.E. Moore is cited in the context of his paradox.
- The only books cited in PI are Plato's *Theaetetus* (without authorship attribution) and Wittgenstein's own *Tractatus*.
- The literature¹² considers Descartes and British Empiricists – Locke, Berkeley and Hume – as principal targets of a PLA, yet none of these names or their works are listed in the PI index.

Requirement III: Premises?

There are no premises identified as such in passages the literature has associated with a PLA; nor is there even a hint as to what assumptions are to belong together as a valid and sound defense of the proposition that a private language is logically impossible. Another standard component of arguments, a claim that premises logically imply the conclusion, is also not expressed. This problem affects the entire book. While arguments appear to be proposed in various passages, none are spelled out and would require significant work to translate into standard form.

Requirement IV: Validity?

Because standard argumentation components are absent, it is no surprise that there is no formal defense of PLA in PI. Well, if the object is to 'dissolve' philosophical problems, why would there be?

IV: Kripke Demurs

Saul Kripke, author of a controversial book on Wittgenstein (Kripke 1982) begs off satisfying argumentation requirements that are standard in analytic philosophy, walking on eggshells as he explains his approach to PI (Kripke 1982, 5):

I suspect – for reasons that will become clearer later – that to attempt to present Wittgenstein's argument precisely is to some extent to falsify it. Probably many of my formulations and recastings of the argument are done in a way Wittgenstein would not himself approve.

¹² See, for example, Jones 1971, editorial introduction, 13-15.

The Private Language Argument: Another Footnote to Plato?

Approve? I doubt that Kripke would assert that precise presentations of arguments by other philosophers (Aristotle? Hume? Kant?) risked ‘falsifying’ them. Kripke does not explain why he thinks Wittgenstein deserves special treatment, though this attitude is nothing new (see biographical articles in Fann 1967, 11-130).

C.D. Broad, a professor at Cambridge in the 1930s, says he skipped weekly Moral Sciences Club meetings in part because (Schilpp 1959, 61):

I was not prepared to spend hours every week in a thick atmosphere of cigarette-smoke, while Wittgenstein punctually went through his hoops, and the faithful as punctually ‘wondered with a foolish face of praise.’

Gilbert Ryle, teaching at Oxford, noticed the same phenomenon when he attended Moral Sciences Club meetings (Monk 1990, 495):

Veneration for Wittgenstein was so incontinent that mentions, for example, my mentions, of any other philosopher were greeted with jeers.

We do not, and indeed should not, worry whether even major figures in the history of philosophy would have ‘approved’ of this or that interpretation of their work. Though Wittgenstein tells us in the Preface of PI that “my thoughts soon grew feeble if I tried to force them along a single track against their natural inclination,” that’s not a reason we should take a philosopher’s personal predilections (excuses?) seriously. We should focus on the details of his contribution and assess rigorously whether it has philosophical merit. I view philosophy as a collection of problems in an eternal, Platonist sense, to which solutions are offered from time to time – some good, some bad, some indifferent – so that the personal preferences are only of biographical significance, if that. Let’s find out what solutions are being proposed and get on with it.

V. PLA Reconstruction Overview

My reconstruction is based on enough PI passages to make attribution reasonable. It relies also on the type-token distinction due to Peirce (Peirce 1906) and the Substitution Theorem (ST) due to Frege (see LeBlanc 1966):¹³

- The literature has identified a total of 137 passages, beginning at 380 and ending at 243, on which a PLA reconstruction can be based, to which I will add three more, 201, 202 and 580, for a potential total of 140 passages.
- It turns out, however, that far fewer passages are needed to build an argument for the proposition that a private language is logically impossible. Accordingly, the resulting argument can be termed ‘minimalist.’
- The type-token distinction (TTD) is a familiar one in analytic philosophy and requires no explanation. I will assume without argument that TTD can apply to

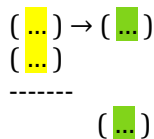
¹³ Such a theorem is also necessary to show that a substitution instance of a valid syllogism is itself valid, which Aristotle never recognized. No one else did until Frege.

Arnold Cusmariu

linguistic as well as non-linguistic objects without worrying about the difference between various applications. I will bracket the issue whether there is version of TTD that is consistent with Wittgenstein's family resemblance model.

- An informal statement of ST will be sufficient for present purposes:
- ST. Uniform substitution of propositional letters in a valid argument form ((P1, P2, P3 ... Pn) / C) will result in a valid argument.

Here is a pictorial explanation of uniform substitution for *modus ponens* from my book *Logic for Kids*:



VI. Private Tasks

In the ordinary sense of 'private performance,' a private performance is given before an exclusive audience, sometimes an audience of one; for example, a performance of a piano sonata by Beethoven before a head of state. A violinist practicing for a recital with no one listening can also be considered a private performance in an extended ordinary sense even though there is no audience.

A private performance in the sense relevant to a PLA is also a performance in which the performer and the audience are one and the same. However, such a performance is exclusive in another sense. Privacy as applied to performing a task in the sense relevant to a PLA is exclusive in an epistemic sense that is conceptually similar to privacy as applied to language in an epistemic sense. Thus, performing a task privately for purposes of a PLA means performing it according to a method whose application only the performer can understand. A key objective of PLA is to challenge the possibility of carrying out certain tasks privately in this sense.

Note, however, that it is the application of the method that is private in the requisite sense, not the method itself, which need not necessarily be private in any sense. So, here is a schema for expressions of the form "person P can perform task X privately," to be instantiated and expanded as we proceed.

PT. Person P can perform task X privately =df Only P can understand how he himself is able to apply method M to perform task X.

- Violin playing can be private in the ordinary sense of being heard by a limited audience (or no audience) but not in the sense of PT. Left hand fingering technique, for example, is not such that only the performing violinist can understand how he is able to apply this technique to playing the violin.
- The method M most compatible with PI is probably introspection. A PLA need not challenge the meaningfulness of introspection as a concept nor its

The Private Language Argument: Another Footnote to Plato?

application in general; only its application to carrying out certain tasks, identified below.

VII. Passage 202

Passage 202 will figure prominently in my PLA reconstruction, contrary to the literature (except Kripke 1982). However, I find existing translations problematic. I need to take care of this matter before proceeding any further.

Here is the German original followed by translations by G.E.M Anscombe in the third edition of PI (202A)¹⁴; by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte in the fourth edition of PI (202B)¹⁵; and my own translation (202C).

202: Darum ist ‘der Regel folgen’ eine Praxis. Und der Regel zu folgen *glauben* ist nicht: der Regel folgen. Und darum kann man nicht der Regel ‘privatim’ folgen, weil sonst der Regel zu folgen glauben dasselbe wäre, wie der Regel folgen.

202A: And hence also ‘obeying a rule’ is a practice. And to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule ‘privately’; otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it.

202B: That’s why ‘following a rule’ is a practice. And to *think* one is following a rule is not to follow a rule. And that’s why it’s not possible to follow a rule ‘privately’; otherwise thinking one was following a rule would be the same thing as following a rule.

202C: That’s why ‘following a rule’ is a practice. And to *believe* one is following a rule is not to follow a rule. And that’s why one cannot follow a rule ‘privately’; otherwise believing one was following a rule would be the same as following it.

Translation Comments

- The meaning of “folgen” in English is “to follow.” The German of “to obey” is “gehörchen,” which does not occur in the German original of 202.
- The meaning of “glauben” in English is “to believe.” The German of “to think” is “denken,” which does not occur in the German original of 202.
- The PI text contains dozens of occurrences of “denken” and its cognates, all of which translators render literally as “to think” and its cognates. I found no translations of “denken” as “to believe.”
- Occurrences of “glauben” are translated literally as “believe” at 24, 105, 140 and 260. In addition to 202, occurrences of “glauben” translated as “think” can be found at 69, 101, 114 and 139.
- The meaning of “kann man nicht” in English is “one cannot.” The German of “it is not possible” is “es ist nicht möglich,” which does not occur in the German original of 202.
- Therefore, 202C is a more accurate translation.

¹⁴ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1958 [1953]. *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. London: Blackwell.

¹⁵ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2009 [1953]. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Revised by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. London: Blackwell.

- Belief ascriptions rely on the dispositional sense of 'belief,' whereas 'thought' is closer to an occurrent sense of mental activity. Wittgenstein appears to intend the dispositional sense, which is another reason 'belief' should be used in translating 202.
- Beliefs are bearers of truth values along with statements and sentences, not thoughts. For example, the traditional definition of knowledge is justified true belief, not justified true thought.
- The modal operator raises the question whether the possibility in the passage is logical or metaphysical, which is best avoided in the PI context.
- More seriously, because the 'hence' after the second sentence suggests an inference, deriving "it is impossible to bring about X" from "one cannot do X" attributes an obvious howler to Wittgenstein!

VIII. Passages Relevant to My PLA Reconstruction

This section lists PI passages relevant to my version of PLA, along with comments as appropriate.

201: That's why there is an inclination to say: every action according to a rule is an interpretation. But one should speak of interpretation only when one expression of a rule is substituted for another.

Substantive Comment: This remark hints at the Substitution Theorem. Wittgenstein was familiar with Frege's work and may have known ST. My PLA reconstruction does a good deal more with this important theorem than is hinted at in 201.

202 (my translation): That's why 'following a rule' is a practice. And to *believe* one is following a rule is not to follow a rule. And that's why one cannot follow a rule 'privately'; otherwise believing one was following a rule would be the same as following it.

Substantive Comment 1: The text of 202 seems to suggest the following valid argument: (1) If person P can follow a rule privately, then P thinking that he is following a rule logically implies that he is following a rule. (2) Thinking that-p does not logically imply that-p. Therefore, (3) P cannot follow a rule privately. The issue is why the first premise is true, which cannot be explained merely by appealing to whatever definition of privacy is appropriate for following a rule privately.

Substantive Comment 2: Premise (2) is not obvious if construed about seemings. "It seems to me that I am following rule R" does not logically imply "I am following rule R"; but "it seems to me that I am having toothache" does logically imply "I am having a toothache." I found no passage in PI that explains the difference.

Substantive Comment 3: Following a rule privately is problematic according to my PLA reconstruction for a very different reason than the one the text indicates.

243: The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know – to his immediate private sensations (German, *auf seine unmittelbaren, privaten, Empfindungen.*) So another person cannot understand the language (German, *diese Sprache*).

Substantive Comment 1: ‘The language’ in the second sentence has a more restricted scope than it might appear. Only words that perform a denotative function are at issue, namely, words that refer to a person’s ‘immediate private sensations.’

Substantive Comment 2: There is an ambiguity in 243 that can be cleared up using the type-token distinction. An ‘immediate private sensation’ is a sensation token. Pain felt at a specific time in a specific part of the body for a specific duration is a sensation token.

244: But how is the connection 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.

Substantive Comment: The context of Plato’s Cave Allegory in Book VII of *Republic* links up with passage 244 for reasons explained below.

256: Now, what about the language which describes my inner experiences and which only I myself can understand? How do I use words to signify (German original, *bezeichne*) my sensations? – As we ordinarily do? Then are my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensations? 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 of sensation, but only had sensations? And now I simply *associate* names with sensations, and use these names in descriptions.

Translation Comment 1: A literal translation of the German original “*Wie bezeichne ich meine Empfindungen mit Worten?*” is “How do I refer to my sensations with words?”

Substantive Comment 1: Translators give Wittgenstein (undeserved) credit for a key distinction not drawn in the text between language in an abstract sense and making use of a specific type of linguistic expression for a specific purpose. A minimalist PLA reconstruction need not take a stand on the issue of privacy of language in an abstract sense; only on the issue of making private use of linguistic expressions that can perform a denoting function. We need to tread much more carefully here than the PI text indicates.

Substantive Comment 2: Type-token ambiguity is also present in passage 256. I do not know if Wittgenstein was familiar with Peirce’s distinction. The family resemblance model suggests that he wasn’t or didn’t think it was philosophically significant. I haven’t researched what the literature says about this, if anything.

257: 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 managed this naming of pain? And whatever he did, was it on purpose? – When one says “He gave a name to his sensation”, one forgets that much must be prepared in the language for mere naming to make sense.

Substantive Comment: The context of Plato's Cave Allegory links up with passage 257 as well, for reasons explained below.

258: Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation.

Substantive Comment 1: Recurrence is a key component of the problem of universals (see Cusmariu 1979B), the others being predication and classification. Interestingly, PI does not invoke the family resemblance model to explain sensation recurrence.

Substantive Comment 2: Recurrence makes sense only for sensation types. Sensation tokens do not recur.

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.

Substantive Comment 3: The 'it' must be a sensation token, so that the passage should be read as ending with 'on which I have the sensation token.'

– I first want to observe that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated. – But all the same, 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, doesn't it? – Well, that is done precisely by the concentrating of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connection between the sign and the sensation. – But "I impress it on myself" can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection *correctly* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem correct to me is correct. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'correct.'

Substantive Comment 4: Descartes would have made the correct point that if it seems to to person X that he is experiencing a certain sensation-token, then it is at least evident to X that he is experiencing that sensation-token and perhaps even true that he is experiencing that sensation token, so X does not need a criterion of correctness. To be perceived is to be for sensation tokens. Descartes point remains even if the Evil Genius is manipulating a person's brain to produce a phantom sensation token. A toothache does not feel any less awful for being simulated by the Evil Genius. Phantom pains are no less painful because the leg is missing.

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

Substantive Comment: My reconstruction puts this important point to good use.

262: One might say: someone who has given himself a private explanation (German original, *Wörterklärung*) of a word must inwardly *resolve* (German original, *vornehmen*) to use the word in such-and-such a way. And how does he resolve that? Should I assume that he invents the technique of applying the word; or that he found it ready-made

Translation Comment 1: Literally, 'Wörterklärung' means 'word clarification.' It can also be translated as 'definition of a word.'

Translation Comment 2: A clearer translation of 'vornehmen' is 'to undertake.'

268: And the same could be asked if a person had given himself a private explanation 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.

Substantive Comment: Passage 268 also links up with Plato's Cave Allegory.

380: I could not apply any rules to a *private* transition from what is seen to words. Here the rules really would hang in the air; for the institution of their application is lacking.

311: "What greater difference can there be?" – In the case of pain, I believe that I can privately give myself an exhibition of the difference. – For the private exhibition, however, you don't have to give yourself actual pain; it is enough to *imagine* it. ... This private exhibition is an illusion.

Substantive Comment: The type-token distinction is helpful in 311 as well. Imagining a sensation token without experiencing one is not like imagining having a sixth finger without actually having one, so in that sense the 'illusion' comment is correct.

580: An 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria (German original, *Ein 'innerer Vorgang' bedarf äußerer Kriterien.*)¹⁶

Grammatical Comment: 'Bedarf' is a (masculine) noun in German, so the word should have been written with a capital 'B' in the original because nouns are capitalized in German, e.g. 'Kriterium.' Perhaps it's a typo; perhaps the text was intended to read '*bedarft*' meaning 'requires.' Accordingly, I propose this:

580 (my translation): An 'inner process' requires outward criteria.

Substantive Comment 1: Passage 580 seems to imply that a person cannot decide whether he has followed a rule correctly using 'inner criteria,' which can at most result in a belief that he has followed a rule correctly. Whether the belief is true requires appeal to considerations that are 'external' to the belief. 580 seems to imply the correspondence theory of truth but I will not argue here that it does so.

Substantive Comment 2: Passage 580 should have been placed much earlier in the PI narrative, probably soon after 202. Stated as "A private process requires public criteria" 580 would have established a clear connection to other passages associated with a PLA.

¹⁶ P.M.S. Hacker (1972, 277) agrees 580 is part of PLA, though he only provides a partial quote of the passage and does not identify it by number.

IX. Plato Anticipates

The Allegory of the Cave Plato described in Book VII of *Republic* comes remarkably close to anticipating the private language problem and the solution presented below. Here are the passages I have in mind in Tom Griffith's translation (Griffith 2000, 220-21.)

Republic 514a2-b8: Picture human beings living in some sort of underground cave dwelling, with an entrance which is long, as wide as the cave, and open to the light. Here they live, *from earliest childhood*¹⁷, with their legs and necks in chains, so that they have to stay where they are, looking only ahead of them, prevented by the chains from turning their heads. They have light from a distant fire, which is burning behind them and above them. Between the fire and the prisoners, at a higher level than them, is a path along which you must picture a low wall that has been built, like the screen which hides people when they are giving a puppet show, and above which they make the puppets appear.

Republic 515b6-8: So if they were able to talk to one another, don't you think they'd believe that the things they were giving names to were the things they could see passing?¹⁸

¹⁷ My italics. Griffith uses the locution "earliest childhood" in translating passages before and after 514a as well, e.g., 386a, 395c, 401d, 403d, 413c, 463d, 467d, 485d, 519a and 572c. Here are other translations:

- Shorey 1961, 747: "... legs and necks fettered from childhood."
- Grube 1974, 168: "The men have been there from childhood."
- Waterfield 1993, 240: "They've been there since childhood."
- Grube 1997 rev. Reeve, 1132: "They've been there since childhood."
- Reeve 2004, 208: "They have been there since childhood."
- Lee 2007, 241: "... since they were children ..."
- Rowe 2012, 239: "They have been there since childhood."
- Jowett 2016, 186: "Here they have been from their childhood."
- Bloom 2016, 193: "They are in it from childhood ..."

¹⁸ Here are alternative translations of this passage, which do not form a consistent set:

- Shorey 1961, 747: "If then they were able to talk to one another, do you not think that they would suppose that in naming the things that they saw they were naming the passing objects?"
- Grube 1974, 168: "If they could converse with one another, do you not think that they would consider these shadows to be the real things?"
- Waterfield 1993, 241: "Now, suppose they were able to talk to one another: don't you think they'd assume that their words applied to what they saw passing by in front of them?"
- Grube 1997 rev. Reeve, 1133: "And if they could talk to one another, don't you think they'd suppose that the names they used applied to the things they see passing before them?"
- Reeve 2004, 208: "And if they could engage in discussion with one another, don't you think they would assume that the words they used applied to the things they see passing in front of them?"

What was the point of describing people in the Cave, now adults, as living in chains ‘from earliest childhood,’ or words to that effect. Why does it matter how long they’ve been living in such an appalling condition?

Assuming it does matter, there is an obvious explanation: To grab the reader’s attention as per Drama 101. Every story has to have a hook, the more effective the hook, the better. Besides, Plato the dramatist was up against stiff competition. Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides were looking over his shoulder, not to mention Homer.

Because the author of *Republic* is a philosopher, however, the obvious won’t do. I suggest we were told that people lived in chains ‘from earliest childhood’ so we would infer that language skills could not have been acquired through socialization, absent in the Cave. Having reached that conclusion, we were supposed to ask “How else could they have been acquired?” As it turns out, this is a trick question.

True enough, 515a tells us there were people in the Cave who milled about behind the prisoners, talking and carrying various objects whose shadows were projected on the wall. However, the narrative does not state or imply – which it could have – that they spoke to the prisoners. Considering that the prisoners’ range of motion was restricted in a way that prevented them from turning their heads, it is clear they could not see or talk to the people carrying objects behind them. So that’s that.

How, then, would prisoners have been able to acquire language skills sufficient for communicating with one another? Communication is ambiguous between act and content. The content part, according to Plato’s doctrine of recollection,¹⁹ was not acquired at all. It was present at birth. Like everyone else, the prisoners were born with a storehouse of shared meanings, which they could

-
- Lee 2007, 241: “Then if they were able to talk to each other, would they not assume that the shadows they saw were the real things?”
 - Rowe 2012, 240: “So if the prisoners were able to have conversations with each other, don’t you think they’d label whatever they were seeing in front of them as what those things actually are?”
 - Jowett 2016, 186: “And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?”
 - Bloom 2016, 194: “If they were able to discuss things with one another, don’t you believe they would hold that they are naming these things going by them that they see?”
 - Zeyl 2022 (private communication): “So if they could converse with each other, don’t you think that they would believe that the things they were seeing are the actual things?”

¹⁹ I used to think this doctrine was outlandish until I struck stone with chisel for the first time in art class and had the feeling I had done it before, perhaps in a former life. I needed virtually no instruction in matters of technique. To this day I consider myself a kind of spectator when working on a sculpture. I try to stay out of the way and let my hands do as they wish. I’m at a loss how to explain this fact except anamnesis. This seems to me true in general of people considered ‘naturals’ at some activity.

draw upon to talk to one another once old enough to do so. At some point, how and when we do not know, prisoners would recollect the appropriate words and their meanings and use them to refer to the shadows on the Cave wall, including to identify and reidentify them as necessary.

So far, so good. Now, if we ask hypothetically what sort of meanings are possible in the Cave environment in the absence of socialization and a recollected storehouse of shared meanings, we arrive at the private language problem. Thus, the words prisoner X would use to refer to the images he sees on the wall can be understood only by X, likewise the words used by prisoners Y, Z and so on. Only private language games can be played in the Cave environment in such circumstances. But can they?

To connect with a PLA, with a bit of rewriting, passages 244, 257, 262 and 268 can be seen to apply to the Cave situation I've just described:

244C: But how can the Cave prisoners set up the connection between the name and the thing named? This question is the same as: how did they learn the meaning of the names of sensations? – of the word 'pain' for example. Here is one possibility: The prisoners connected words with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used it in their place.

257C: So, do Cave prisoners understand a name, without being able to explain its meaning to anyone? When one says "He gave a name to his sensation", one forgets that much must be prepared in the language for mere naming to make sense [which are missing in the Cave.]

262C: A Cave prisoner who has given himself a private explanation of a word must inwardly *resolve* to use the word in such-and-such a way. And how does he resolve that? Should we assume that he invents the technique of applying the word; or that he found it ready-made?

268C: Suppose a Cave prisoner had given himself a private explanation of a word, e.g. 'blorse,' to be used to refer to a shadow on the wall resembling a horse; if he said the word 'blorse' to himself and at the same time directed his attention to the right shadow. [But, how does he decide which shadow is right and whether 'blorse,' if used again, was used correctly?]

Recall that, according to Plato, Cave prisoners can only hold beliefs, but can upgrade to knowledge once out of the Cave and in the sunlight of the Forms. As to how Cave prisoners can upgrade from belief to knowledge, Plato's answer is dialectic. What he meant by this concept is controversial (see Grube 1935, Friedländer 1958, White 1976, Gadamer 1980, Mueller 1992, Griffith 2000).

Here is Grube's view of the matter, which supports my second point that the Cave Allegory can be interpreted as anticipating my solution that there can be no such thing as a 'private dialectic,' which would never get the prisoners out of the Cave!

Grube 1935, 239: As to the nature of this dialectic, it is clearly the power to think and express oneself logically. And as he has insisted that the objects of logical thought – the universals, the Forms – exist, he can speak of dialectic as the

The Private Language Argument: Another Footnote to Plato?

discovery of these Forms. For the present we may therefore consider dialectic mainly as the power of apprehending the Ideas, of thinking logically, so that the content of one's thought corresponds to Reality.

X. A Minimalist PLA Reconstruction

Here is the argument structure I propose, stated for sensation tokens. Steps 1-7 are premises; steps 8-13 follow by *modus tollens* as indicated. The next section fills in the details, including justification and links to PI.

1. If philosophical theory T is true, then, person P can refer to his own sensation tokens using words only he himself can understand.
2. Person P can refer to his own sensation tokens using words only he himself can understand only if person P can identify his own sensation tokens privately.
3. Person P can identify his own sensation tokens privately only if person P can reidentify his own sensation tokens privately.
4. Person P can reidentify his own sensation tokens privately only if person P can determine privately that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type.
5. Person P can determine privately that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type only if person P can follow a rule R privately to yield a valid argument for the proposition that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type.
6. Person P can follow a rule R privately to yield a valid argument for the proposition that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type only if person P following rule R privately to yield an argument for the proposition that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type can satisfy condition C privately.
7. Person P following rule R privately to yield an argument for the proposition that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type cannot satisfy condition C privately.

Therefore, by *modus tollens* from 7 and 6,

8. Person P cannot follow a rule R privately to yield a valid argument for the proposition that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type.

Therefore, by *modus tollens* from 8 and 5,

9. Person P cannot determine privately that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type.

Therefore, by *modus tollens* from 9 and 4,

Arnold Cusmariu

10. Person P cannot reidentify his own sensation tokens privately.

Therefore, by *modus tollens* from 10 and 3,

11. Person P cannot identify his own sensation tokens privately.

Therefore, by *modus tollens* from 11 and 2,

12. Person P cannot refer to his own sensation tokens using words only he himself can understand.

Therefore, by *modus tollens* from 12 and 1,

13. Philosophical theory T is not true.

XI. Justifying the Premises

Premise 1: If philosophical theory T is true, person P can refer to his own sensation tokens using words only he himself can understand.

PI Sourcing for Premise 1:

243: The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know – to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.

PLA Targets: Traditional

- The literature is in agreement that philosophical theory T can be attributed to Descartes and the British Empiricists. I will take it for granted this is true because it would take us too far afield to identify specific doctrines these philosophers held that assert or imply T; prove that T commits them to premise 1; and provide passages supporting these claims.²⁰ Nevertheless, it will be useful to cite two more recent potential targets of the PLA, Bertrand Russell and Rudolf Carnap.
- Russell and Wittgenstein were friends and collaborators at one time (see Russell 1967-69; Clark 1975; and Monk 1996). Russell helped secure the publication of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, wrote a flattering review published in the book, and acted as examiner with G.E. Moore so Wittgenstein could get his PhD at Cambridge University. That all changed later. For example:

PLA Targets: Bertrand Russell

Russell 1959, 160-1: Its positive doctrines seem to me trivial and its negative doctrines unfounded. I have not found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* anything that seemed to me interesting and I do not understand why a whole school finds important wisdom in its pages. ... If it is true, philosophy is, at best, a slight help to lexicographers, and at worst, an idle tea-table amusement.

²⁰ In regard to Descartes, the reader may find it useful to have a look at Cusmariu 2021.

The Private Language Argument: Another Footnote to Plato?

- Russell evidently failed to see that PLA took dead aim at views he had expressed decades earlier, for example in 1914. Here are relevant passages.

Russell 1914 [2019], 77: The first fact to notice is that, as far as can be discovered, no sensible²¹ is ever a datum to two people at once. The things seen by two different people are often closely similar, so similar that the same *words* can be used to denote them, without which communication with others concerning sensible objects would be impossible. But, in spite of this similarity, it would seem that some difference always arises from difference in the point of view. Thus each person, so far as his sense-data are concerned, lives in a private world.

- Russell should have written ‘no sensible token’ rather than ‘no sensible.’ A sensible type can indeed be ‘a datum to two people at once.’

- With a bit of work, which won’t be attempted here, my PLA reconstruction can be extended to apply to Russell’s views about sense-data. Passage 380 of PI hints as much:

380: I could not apply any rules to a *private* transition from what is seen to words. Here the rules really would hang in the air; for the institution of their application is lacking.

- For Russell, sense data are ‘what is seen.’

- The PLA also applies to Russell’s 1918 views:

Russell 1918 [1956], 198: A logically perfect language, if it could be constructed, would not only be intolerably prolix, but, as regards its vocabulary, would be very largely private to one speaker. That is to say, all the names that it would use would be private to that speaker and could not enter into the language of another speaker.²²

PLA Targets: Rudolf Carnap

- Rudolf Carnap was also a one-time admirer of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, which became a sort of bible for 20th century logical positivists, for example:

• **Carnap 1934 [1995], 79-80:** In general, every statement in any person’s protocol language would have sense for that person alone, would be fundamentally outside the understanding of other persons, without sense for them. Hence every person would have his own protocol language. Even when the same words and sentences occur in various protocol languages, their sense would be different, they could not even be compared.

Premise 2: Person P can refer to his own sensation tokens using words only he himself can understand only if person P can identify his own sensation tokens privately.

PI Sourcing for Premise 2:

256: Now, what about the language which describes my inner experiences and which only I myself can understand? How do I use words to signify (German original, *bezeichnen*) my sensations? – As we ordinarily do? Then are my words for sensations tied up with my natural expressions of sensations? In that case

²¹What Russell calls ‘sensibles,’ other philosophers have called ‘sensa,’ ‘sense data,’ or ‘qualia.’

²² The discussion of Plato’s Cave Allegory above bears on this issue.

Arnold Cusmariu

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 of sensation, but only had sensations? And now I simply associate names with sensations, and use these names in descriptions.

- Premise 2 is true of non-privacy contexts as well. Its converse is false.
- Premise 2 seems true because its negation is unintuitive. That is, it would be odd in general for a person to be able to use the term 'toothache' to refer to his toothache but be unable to identify a sensation as a toothache rather than, for example, a backache. It seems that if he can do one, he can do the other.

Private identification of sensation tokens is a task that falls under schema PT.

PT. Person P can perform task X privately =df Only P can understand how he himself is able to apply method M to perform task X.

Instantiating PT with respect to the identification of sensation tokens yields this:

PTSTI. Person P can identify his own sensation token ST privately =df Only P can understand how he himself is able to apply method M to determine that ST exemplifies individuating property F.

- Informally, an individuating property is a property expressed by an open sentence of the form "x = the so-and-so" or "x = a," where 'a' is a proper name or an individual constant.

Premise 3: Person P can identify his own sensations privately only if person P can reidentify his own sensations privately.

PI Sourcing for Premise 3

- The method M that is most consistent with the PI text is introspection, in this case a sort mental pointing described in PI variously. Recall that a PLA need not challenge the meaningfulness of introspection as a concept nor its application in the general case; only its application to carrying out certain tasks, in this case determining that a sensation token exemplifies an individuating property.
- This premise also true of non-privacy contexts. Its converse is true of privacy as well as non-privacy contexts.
- Assuming recurrence, identification implies reidentification. Passage 258 makes this point, where private methods of reidentification are mentioned and rejected.

258: 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

The Private Language Argument: Another Footnote to Plato?

definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign. – Well, that is done precisely by the concentrating of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connection between the sign and the sensation. – But “I impress it on myself” can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connection 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.’

Private reidentification of sensation tokens is also a task that falls under schema PT. Instantiating with respect to reidentification of sensation tokens yields this:

PTSTRI. Person P can reidentify his own sensation token ST privately =df Only P can understand how he himself is able to apply method M to determine that ST re-exemplifies individuating property F.

Premise 4: Person P can reidentify his own sensations privately only if person P can determine privately that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type.

- This premise is a near tautology. It is also true in non-privacy contexts.

Determining privately that sensation tokens experienced at different times are tokens of the same type also falls under schema PT. Instantiating yields this:

PTSTD. Person P can determine privately that sensation tokens ST1 and ST2 experienced at different times are tokens of the same type T =df Only P can understand how he is able to apply method M to determine that sensation tokens ST1 and ST2 co-exemplify an individuating property of sensations of type T.

- It can be assumed without argument that sensation types can exemplify individuating properties as well as sensation tokens, though not necessarily the same individuating property.

Premise 5: Person P can determine privately that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type only if person P can follow a rule R privately to yield a valid argument for the proposition that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type.

- The doxastic burden imposed by Premise 5 isn’t as heavy as it might appear. For example, the premise does not require person P to (a) determine anything privately; or (b) follow rule R privately; only that he can do so. Presumably, if he can do one, he can do the other.
- Following rule in this article means following a rule of inference, which in turn means applying the Substitution Theorem. Let us show that identification and reidentification are *modus ponens* arguments, so that rule R is *modus ponens*.

A Valid Token-type Identification Argument

1. If sensation token ST experienced at time t has property F, then sensation token ST is a token of sensation type S.

Arnold Cusmariu

2. Sensation token ST experienced at time t has property F.

Therefore, by *modus ponens*

3. Sensation token ST is a token of sensation type S.

A Valid Reidentification Argument

1. If sensation token ST1 perceived at time t1 has property F and sensation token ST2 perceived at time t2 has the same property F, then sensation token ST1 and sensation token ST2 are tokens of the same type.
2. Sensation token ST1 perceived at time t1 has property F and sensation token ST2 is perceived at time t2 has the same property F.

Therefore, by *modus ponens*,

3. Sensation token ST1 perceived at time t1 and sensation token ST2 perceived at time t2 are tokens of the same type.
- Passage 244 suggests that property F is behavioral. (For my views on property identity, see Cusmariu 1978A.)

244: But how is the connection 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.

Following a rule privately is also a task that falls under PT. MP is the rule of interest here. Instantiating PT with respect to following MP privately yields this:

PTMP. Person P can follow MP privately to yield a valid argument for the proposition that sensation tokens he experienced at different times are tokens of the same type =df Only P can understand how he himself is able to apply MP to yield a valid argument for the proposition that sensation tokens he himself experienced at different times are tokens of the same type.

Premise 6: Person P can follow a rule R privately to yield a valid argument for the proposition that sensation tokens experienced at different times are tokens of the same type only if person P following rule R privately to yield an argument for the proposition that sensation tokens experienced at different times are tokens of the same type can satisfy condition C privately.

PI Sourcing for Premise 6:

- This premise applies Wittgenstein’s dictum at 580 (my translation).

580: An ‘inner process’ requires outward criteria.

Condition C is the Substitution Theorem (ST). Satisfying ST privately is also a task that falls under PT. Instantiating and adding a suitable method yields this:

The Private Language Argument: Another Footnote to Plato?

PTDT. Person P can satisfy ST privately = df Only P can understand P how he himself is able to satisfy the defining conditions of ST.

Premise 7: Person P following rule R privately to yield an argument for the proposition that sensation tokens experienced at different times are tokens of the same type cannot satisfy condition C privately.

PI Sourcing for Premise 7:

- Passage 259 of PI implies an affirmative answer to the question raised.
- **259:** Are the rules of the private language *impressions* of rules? – The balance on which impressions are weighed is not the *impression* of a balance.
- Premise 7 denies that only the person who is able to carry out uniform substitution in a valid argument form can understand how he himself is able to do so. Additional justification for this premise is provided in the next section.

XII. Questions and Answers

Question: Merely citing what comes across as an off-handed remark – PI is full of them – is not enough. Why shouldn't we conclude that your argument reached an impasse, unless further justification can be provided for Premise 7?

Answer: Premise 7 can be justified by means of a burden-of-proof argument (BPA).

- A BPA would challenge someone to explain how following rule R privately to yield an argument for the proposition that sensation tokens experienced at different times are tokens of the same type can satisfy condition C privately.

To get a sense of what is problematic about satisfying ST privately, here again is my informal explanation of what is involved in uniform substitution of propositional letters in MP, showing literally what is entailed.

$$\begin{array}{l} (\dots) \rightarrow (\dots) \\ (\dots) \\ \text{-----} \\ (\dots) \end{array}$$

How exactly would person P be able to follow the colors to fill in this structure such that that no one else could understand how P was able to do so?

- A BPA challenge would not stop at MP. Whoever thinks MP can be applied privately must hold that this can be done for any rule of inference in the quantificational as well as the propositional calculus. Good luck with that!
- But wait, there's worse! Whoever thinks there can be such thing as privately applied logic must explain how this can accomplish everything

standard logic can accomplish, including providing a foundation for mathematics and science.

- As co-author of *Principia Mathematica*, Russell would have vehemently denied that there can be such a thing as private applications of logic. It's a good question, then, why he didn't see that his views on privacy had this consequence if pushed far enough. This point also applies to Carnap.
- My PLA reconstruction shows we must choose between standard logic and being stuck inside the circle of our private ideas, never escaping Plato's Cave.

Question: Your argument proves a rather technical proposition, that it is not logically possible for person to make private use of language to refer to his own sensations, not the proposition that private languages as such are logically impossible. Isn't Wittgenstein after the more ambitious proposition?

Answer: The text favors a narrow interpretation of Wittgenstein's goals. A key passage, 243, seems to me to support the conclusion of my PLA reconstruction, namely, that privacy is to be applied to sensations and that 'the language' in this context is to be restricted to denoting phrases referring to sensations. Here is the passage once again:

243: The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know – to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.

Moreover, the term 'immediate' only makes sense here if it is applied to sensation tokens; that is, to sensations experienced by a specific person at a specific time and for a specific duration. The text is clear on restriction to denoting phrases referring to sensations.

Question: Passages 262 and 268 of PI describe private explanations of sensation words as involving a two part method: (a) uttering a sensation-type word to oneself and then (b) directing one's attention to a sensation token of that type. How would a PLA rule out private explanations of sensation words that followed this method?

Answer: Step one would be to motivate the purpose of such a PLA by identifying an actual (rather than merely possible) philosophical theory and show that it was committed to the logical possibility of private explanations of sensation words that followed the method described in 262 and 268. Such motivation is not easy to find in the PI text, which often takes for granted that criticism of this or that method or solution is not aimed at a straw man, leaving it to others to fill in the blanks – a version of the Socratic Method, I suppose.

- Quite possibly Russell 1918 and Carnap 1934 accepted a theory that entailed the logical possibility of private explanations of sensation words described in 262 and 268. It also seems plausible to suppose that, absent socialization and a shared storehouse of remembered meanings, prisoners in Plato's Cave would be stuck having to learn the meaning of sensation words by following the method described in 262 and 268.

The Private Language Argument: Another Footnote to Plato?

Step two would be to explain the sense in which explanations of the meaning of sensation words that followed the method described in 262 and 268 were private.

- To this point, privacy has been understood in epistemic terms. Thus, “person P applied out method M privately to perform task X” has been shorthand for “only P can understand his application of method M to his own performance of task X.”
- What, then, would it mean for person P to apply conjunctive method M of uttering a sensation-type word to himself and then direct his attention to a sensation token of that type such that no one else could understand this application of method M?
- Perhaps a different concept of privacy would be appropriate. For example, “person P carried out method M privately” might be shorthand for “only person P can verify that he carried out method M.” Using ‘verify’ would have a point, however, only if it meant “can verify that he had done it correctly.” These are matters for another time.

XIII. Two Sculptures



Cusmariu: *Counterpoint A22*, 2019
Alabaster on mahogany and marble
16.5 inches high



Wittgenstein: *Head of a Girl*, 1925-28
Fired clay
15.5 inches high

- I noted earlier that my training in analytic philosophy and my views on ontology, which were and still are Platonist, significantly shaped my work as a sculptor. As I progressed in search of an individual voice in art – to ‘make it new,’ as Beethoven put it – I found it very helpful to give Plato’s insightful metaphor of *interweaving forms* a musical interpretation, which led to the *Counterpoint* series.
- With that in mind, I thought readers might want to compare a sculpture by an analytic philosopher who is a Platonist with a sculpture by an analytic

philosopher whose sympathies were nominalist.²³ I will leave it to readers to study the two artworks and analyze differences. A few comments are in order.

- Wittgenstein's sculpture is a Renaissance knock-off. It doesn't rise to the level of creativity and imagination exemplified by the *Tractatus*. He doesn't seem to have realized that philosophical theories can have aesthetic impact at a practical level.
- Brâncuși, Archipenko, Moore, Calder, Giacometti, and Lipchitz *inter alia* were doing something completely different at the time. I hope readers will see that my *Counterpoint A22* is completely different from what these major artists were doing a century ago. Cusmariu 2009, 2017A and 2017B explain my working aesthetic.
- Wittgenstein sculpture arguably illustrates the aesthetic poverty of nominalism, a philosophical theory opposed to abstract entities and by implication abstraction itself. While *Counterpoint A22* is a concrete object, as are all sculptures, its aesthetic attributes and mereology are abstract in a different sense of the term.
- Wittgenstein's sculpture is figurative – a copy of a copy – and as such runs afoul of Plato's objections to art in Book X of *Republic*. *Counterpoint A22* evades those objections.²⁴

References

- Ayer, A.J. 1966. "Can There Be a Private Language?" In *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, edited by George Pitcher, 251-266. New York: Anchor Books.
- Baker, G.P. 1998. "The Private Language Argument." In *Language & Communication* 18: 325–56.
- Candlish, Stewart and George Wrisley, "Private Language," In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/private-language/>>.
- Canfield, John V. 1975. "'I Know that I'm in Pain' Is Senseless." In *Analysis and Metaphysics: Essays in Honor of R.M. Chisholm*, edited by Keith Lehrer, 129-144. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- . 2001. "Private Language: the Diary Case." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 79: 377–94.
- Carnap, Rudolf. 1934 [1995]. *The Unity of Science*. Translated with an introduction by Max Black. Bristol: Thoemmes Press.
- Castaneda, Hector-Neri. 1971. "The Private-Language Argument." In *Jones*: 214-239.

²³ Analytic philosophers Arthur Danto and Keith Lehrer also produced artworks – paintings, to be specific. I have not discerned any influence of analytic philosophy in their artworks, nor did they publish books or articles explaining their working aesthetic.

²⁴ My thanks Gary Rosenkrantz and Don Zeyl for helpful correspondence.

- Chisholm, Roderick M. 1957. *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 1966. *Theory of Knowledge*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Clark, Ronald W. 1976. *The Life of Bertrand Russell*. New York: Knopf.
- Cook, John W. "Wittgenstein on Privacy." In *The Private Language Argument*, edited by O.R. Jones, 240-272. London: Macmillan.
- Crary, Alice and Rupert Read (eds.). 2000. *The New Wittgenstein*. London: Routledge.
- Cusmariu, Arnold. Forthcoming 2023. *Logic for Kids: All Aboard the **Therefore** Train*. Singapore: Jenny Stanford Publishing.
- . 2021. "The *Cogito* Paradox." *Symposion. Theoretical and Applied Inquiries in Philosophy and Social Sciences* 8 (1): 7-43.
- . 2017A. "The Prometheus Challenge." *Symposion. Theoretical and Applied Inquiries in Philosophy and Social Sciences* 4 (1): 17-47.
- . 2017B. "The Prometheus Challenge Redux." *Symposion. Theoretical and Applied Inquiries in Philosophy and Social Sciences* 4 (2): 175-209.
- . 2016A. "Toward an Epistemology of Art." *Symposion. Theoretical and Applied Inquiries in Philosophy and Social Sciences* 3 (1): 37-64.
- . 2016B. "A Methodology for Teaching Logic-Based Skills to Mathematics Students." *Symposion. Theoretical and Applied Inquiries in Philosophy and Social Sciences* 3 (3): 259-292.
- . 2016C. "Semantic Epistemology Redux: Proof and Validity in Quantum Mechanics." *Logos & Episteme. An International Journal of Epistemology* VII (3): 287-304.
- . 2015A. "The Perils of Aphrodite: A New Take on Star Theory." *Film International* 13 (3): 97-116.
- . 2015B. "Baudelaire's Critique of Sculpture." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 49 (3): 96-124.
- . 2012. "Toward a Semantic Approach in Epistemology." *Logos & Episteme. An International Journal of Epistemology* III.4: 531-543.
- . 2009. "The Structure of an Aesthetic Revolution." *Journal of Visual Arts Practice* 8 (3): 163-179.
- . 1985. "Self-Predication and the 'Third Man'." *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 23: 105-118.
- . 1980. "Ryle's Paradox and the Concept of Exemplification." *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 10: 65-71.
- . 1979A. "Russell's Paradox Re-Examined." *Erkenntnis* 14: 365-370.
- . 1979B. "On an Aristotelian Theory of Universals." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 57 (1): 51-58.
- . 1978A. "About Property Identity." *Auslegung* 5 (3): 139-146.

- . 1978B. "Self-Relations." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 16 (4): 321-327.
- Donagan, Alan. "Wittgenstein on Sensation." In *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, edited by George Pitcher, 324-351. New York: Anchor Books.
- Dummett, Michael. "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mathematics." In *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, edited by George Pitcher, 420-447. New York: Anchor Books.
- Fann, K.T. 1967. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Man and His Philosophy*. New York: Dell.
- Friedländer, Paul. 1958. *Plato: An Introduction*. Translated by Hans Meyerhoff. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gadamer, H.-G. 1980. *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*. Translated by P. Christopher Smith. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Garver, Newton, 1971. "Wittgenstein on Private Languages." In *The Private Language Argument*, edited by O.R. Jones, 187-196. London: Macmillan.
- Gellner, Ernest. 1959. *Words and Things*. London: Routledge.
- Gram, Moltke. 1971. "Privacy and Language." In *The Private Language Argument*, edited by O.R. Jones, 298-327. London: Macmillan.
- Grube, G.M.A. 1935. *Plato's Thought*. London: Methuen.
- Hacker, P.M.S. 1972. *Insight and Illusion*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Hahn, Lewis Edwin (ed.). 1977. *The Philosophy of Roderick Chisholm*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Hardin, Clyde Laurence. 1971. "Wittgenstein on Private Languages." In *The Private Language Argument*, edited by O.R. Jones, 173-186. London: Macmillan..
- Hymers, Michael. 2017. *Wittgenstein on Sensation and Perception*. London: Routledge.
- Jones, O.R. (editor). 1971. *The Private Language Argument*. London: Macmillan.
- Kenny, Anthony. 1966. "Cartesian Privacy." In *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, edited by George Pitcher, 352-370. New York: Anchor Books.
- . 1973. *Wittgenstein*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Klemke, E.D. 1971. *Essays on Wittgenstein*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Kripke, Saul A. 1982. *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, London: Blackwell.
- Kraut, Richard (editor). 1992. *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LeBlanc, Hughes. 1966. *Techniques of Deductive Inference*. Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Malcolm, Norman. 1966. "Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*." In *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, edited by George Pitcher, 65-103. New York: Anchor Books.
- Manser, Anthony. 1969. "Pain and Private Language." In *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, edited by Peter Winch, 166-183. London: Routledge.
- McGinn, Colin. 1984. *Wittgenstein on Meaning*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- McGinn, Marie. 1997. *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*. London: Routledge.

- Monk, Ray. 1990. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*. New York: The Free Press.
- . 1996. *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude, 1872-1921*. New York: The Free Press.
- Mueller, Ian. 1992. "Mathematical Method, Philosophical Truth". In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, edited by Richard Kraut, 170-199. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nielsen, Keld Stehr. 2008. *The Evolution of the Private Language Argument*. London: Routledge.
- Peirce, Charles Sanders. 1906. "Prolegomena to an Apology for Pragmaticism." *Monist* 16: 492-546.
- Pitcher, George. 1964. *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Pitcher, George (ed.). 1966. *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Plato. *Republic*. 1961. Translated by Paul Shorey. In *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, 575-844. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . *Republic*. 1974. Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- . *Republic*. 1993. Translated by Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . *Republic*. 1997. Translated by G.M.A. Grube, rev. by C.D.C Reeve. In *Plato, Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper, 971-1223. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- . *Republic*. 2000. Translated by Tom Griffith. London: Cambridge.
- . *Republic*. 2004. Translated by C.D.C Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- . *Republic*. 2007. Translated by Desmond Lee. New York: Penguin Classics.
- . *Republic*. 2012. Translated by Christopher Rowe. New York: Penguin Classics.
- . *Republic*. 2016. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. Digireads.com Publishing.
- . *Republic*. 2016. Translated by Alan Bloom. New York: Basic Books.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1914 [2019]. "The Relation of Sense Data to Physics." *Scientia* 16 (16): 1-27. Reprinted in Russell, Bertrand. *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*, 71-86. Dumfries & Galloway: Anodos Books. Page references are to this edition.
- . 1918 [1956]. "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism." Reprinted in *Logic and Knowledge*, edited by Robert C. Marsh, 178-281. London: Macmillan.
- . 1921. "Introduction" to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus*. London: Routledge.
- . 1959. *My Philosophical Development*. New York: Allen & Unwin.

Arnold Cusmariu

- . 1967-69. *Autobiography*. Three volumes. London: Routledge.
- Ryle, Gilbert. 1939. "Plato's 'Parmenides'." *Mind* 48: 129-151.
- Schilpp, P.A. (ed.). 1959. *The Philosophy of C.D. Broad*. New York: Tudor.
- Shwayder, D.S. 1969. "Wittgenstein on Mathematics." In *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, edited by Peter Winch, 66-116. London: Routledge.
- Stern, David G. 2004. *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strawson, P.F. 1966. "Review of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*." In *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, edited by George Pitcher, 22-64. New York: Anchor Books.
- Stroud, Barry. 1966. "Wittgenstein and Logical Necessity." In *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, edited by George Pitcher, 477-496. New York: Anchor Books.
- . 2000. *Meaning, Understanding, and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Todd, William. 1971. "Wittgenstein and Private Languages." In *The Private Language Argument*, edited by O.R. Jones, 197-213. London: Macmillan.
- Tomas, Vincent. 1959. "Aesthetic Vision." *The Philosophical Review* 68 (1): 52-67.
- White, Nicholas P. 1976. *Plato on Knowledge and Reality*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Winch, Peter (ed.). 1969. *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*. London: Routledge.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1961 [1921]. *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus*. Translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness. London: Routledge.
- . 1958 [1953]. *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. London: Blackwell.
- . 2009 [1953]. *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. Revised by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte. London: Blackwell. All translations are from the H&S edition unless otherwise indicated.
- Wrisley, George. 2011. "Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument." In *Just the Arguments*, edited by Michael Bruce and Steven Barbone, 350-354. London: Blackwell.