

Sensation Terms

Peter Pagin

Are sensation ascriptions descriptive, even in the first person present tense? Do sensation terms refer to, denote, sensations, so that truth and falsity of sensation ascriptions depend on the properties of the denoted sensations? That is, do sensation terms have a denotational semantics? As I understand it, this is denied by Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein rejects the idea of a denotational semantics for public language sensation terms, such as ‘pain’. He also rejects the idea that speakers can *recognize* sensations. I think these views are mistaken.

In this paper I shall present the following: first, my own basic views on how public language sensation terms relate to sensations (section 1); second, to what extent these views are inconsistent with some of Wittgenstein’s main tenets about sensations and sensation language, as set out in *Philosophical Investigations* §§ 243-315, and what I take to be Wittgenstein’s main arguments, in the same text, for those tenets (sections 2 and 3); third, why I think that those arguments are inconclusive (sections 4 and 5); and fourth, what I see as the best arguments for my own views (section 6). Sections 3 and 5 are concerned with the bearing of the private language argument on these matters.

1. Pain as a functional kind of sensation

I shall give a very brief presentation of an account of public language sensation terms which is *denotational* in the following sense: the meaning of a sensation term is given by way of specifying under what conditions an entity (object, individual)¹ belongs to the extension of the term.

As is common, I shall use the concept of pain as my example. On my view, the concept of pain is a concept of a property of individual pain sensations. It is expressed by the predicate “... is a pain“. This is a monadic first order predicate, to speak in logical terms. It is true of an entity just in case that entity is a pain sensation.

Further, my view is that, almost invariably, a speaker who knows the concept of pain can

¹Even though I shall write as if I assumed sensations to be individuals I do not exclude the possibility that sensation terms are mass terms, and "sensations" actually quantities of sensation. The difference between these views is of no consequence for the present discussion.

discriminate among his own sensations. He can distinguish between pains and non-pains.² He has the ability to recognize pains as pains, and non-pains as non-pains, on the basis of the immediate phenomenal qualities of the pains, and non-pains, respectively. I shall use the term “*phenomenal kind*” for a kind of sensations that have a common phenomenal quality. My view is that phenomenal kinds exist and that speakers can recognize sensations as being, or not being, of the same phenomenal kind.³

When a speaker recognizes a pain sensation as a pain sensation he is able to apply the *concept* of pain to it. Applying the concept of pain to a sensation is making a *judgement*. This judgement (or, more precisely, an existential generalization from it) can be expressed in English by sentences like

(1) I have a pain in my left arm

A speaker who sincerely utters (1) expresses a *belief*, the belief that he has a pain in his left arm. It is a belief because it is formed by applying a concept. Virtually without exception, beliefs of this kind, i.e. beliefs that oneself has a pain in ones left arm, are true. And, virtually without exception, when a speaker has such a belief, and the belief is true, the speaker *knows* that he has a pain in his left arm. On my view, the belief qualifies as knowledge because of reliability. Virtually without exception, when I believe that I have a pain i my left arm, this belief is caused by an extremely reliable process. It is reliable for the reason that it virutally *never* produces a belief that I have a pain i my left arm *when in fact* I do not have pain in my left arm. As a result I am very reliable in my (present tense) judgements concerning myself having a pain in my left arm.

I have claimed that each speaker applies the concept of pain, i.e. the *same* concept, to his own sensations. I also claim that each speaker applies the same concept to others, in ascribing to others the state of being in pain. You may think that this implies that the one speaker’s pain sensations must be like the other speaker’s pain sensations. More precisely, you may think that it implies that pain sensations of different speakers must be of the same phenomenal kind.

²The concept of pain is certainly vague, and so there are borderline cases. This does not affect the issue.

³Concerning the individuation of what I call phenomenal qualities (or phenomenal kinds): If there are such things as *simple* or *elementary* phenomenal qualities, i.e. phenomenal qualities which cannot be analyzed into further phenomenal qualities, then my use of the term “phenomenal quality” is not restricted to these. I then apply the term both to simple phenomenal qualities and as well to *finite disjunctions* of simple phenomenal qualities.

It does not follow, however. It *would* follow if the concept of pain were a concept of a *particular* phenomenal quality. If this were the case, and if it would be possible to have others' sensations, then I would be able to recognize your pain sensations as pain sensations just as I am able to recognize my own. But this is something that I do not claim. I do *not claim* that pain sensations of different subjects are phenomenally alike. And I *deny* that the property of being a pain sensation is a phenomenal property. Pain is a kind of sensation, but *not* a phenomenal kind.

In order to state my view of the concept of pain, I must first introduce second order properties, i.e. properties of properties. Let us use "*F*" for a particular second order property. *F* is a property of phenomenal properties of sensations, or, if you like, a property of phenomenal kinds. I shall soon be more specific about *F*.

As an example of a property of phenomenal kinds we have the property of *being instantiated in a citizen of Great Britain*. Let's call this property "*GB*". That there is such a second order property does *not* require that sensations of different subjects can be of the same phenomenal kind. If John Major has a sensation of some particular phenomenal kind *JM*, then *JM* has the property *GB*, for the reason that Mr Major is a citizen of Great Britain. And if Margaret Thatcher has a sensation of some particular phenomenal kind *MT*, then *MT* has the property *GB*, for the reason that Mrs Thatcher is a citizen of Great Britain. It need not be possible for anybody else than Mr Major to have sensations with the property *JM*, and it *need* not even make sense to think so. All that is required for *GB* to apply to both *JM* and *MT* is that both are phenomenal kinds and that both of those who suffer from instances of these kinds, John Major and Margaret Thatcher, respectively, are citizens of Great Britain.

The next step is to introduce a new first order property by means of appeal to second order properties. We have, for instance, the property of being a sensation that has a phenomenal quality that has the (second order) property *GB*. We can call this property *GB**. Assuming that every sensation has some phenomenal quality, *GB** is simply the property (or, if you like, equivalent to the property) of being a sensation of a subject that is a citizen of Great Britain. This we could have defined directly, without taking the detour over second order properties. But in some cases the second order property is essential.

The first order property *GB** is defined by means of quantification over first order properties. In Russell's terminology from the ramified theory of types this makes *GB** a

first order but *second level* property. Formally we would have

$$(2) \quad GB^*x \text{ iff } \exists X(GB(X) \ \& \ Xx)$$

(where 'X' ranges over phenomenal qualities).

My view is that the property of being a pain is such a property, a first order second level property. It is defined by means of quantification over first order properties. The crucial second order property that figures in the definition of *PAIN* is the property I have chosen to call "*F*". Thus the formal definition is this:

$$(PAIN) \quad PAIN \ x \text{ iff } \exists X(F(X) \ \& \ Xx)$$

What property is *F*? It should come as no surprise that *F* has to do with the criteria we use for ascribing pain to others. More precisely, *F* is a property of phenomenal kinds. And a phenomenal kind *G* of sensations has *F* if, and only if, *G* is suitably related to third-person criteria for ascribing pain.

So the main weight is carried by the notion of being suitably related to our third-person criteria. This is as it should be, at least from a Wittgensteinian point of view. Being suitably related to pain behaviour and to normal causes of pain is part of what ensures the intersubjectivity of the concept of pain. I shall use the term "*Pain Behaviour*" (with capitals) to signify the range of bodily behaviour we associate with being in pain. Thus, moanings etc. I assume that this range of behaviour can be specified (in part, ostensively) without recourse to the concept of pain itself. Similarly I shall use "*Pain Inflicting Events*" to signify a range of events, affecting bodies, that, under ordinary circumstances, cause pain.

Now, with the help of the notion of a lawlike connection we can define the property *F*.

$$(F) \quad F(X) \text{ iff } X \text{ is a phenomenal kind such that there is a lawlike connection between unfeigned Pain Behaviour (of some subject } A) \text{ and occurrences of sensations (in } A) \text{ of kind } X, \text{ as well as lawlike connections between occurrences of Pain Inflicting Events (on } A\text{'s body) and occurrences of sensations (in } A) \text{ of kind } X^4$$

With (F) the present explication of the concept of pain is virtually completed. My view

⁴There are some details that I will not bother with, concerning proximity in time, and concerning the possibility that some pain behaviour is related to some kinds of pain but not to others. I hope that I have not forgotten anything essential.

about pain can be summarized in this way: Pain is a kind of sensation, not a phenomenal kind, but a *functional* kind. The second order property *F* is a functional property of phenomenal kinds. A phenomenal kind has it in virtue of its relations to kinds of physical states. And in virtue of this you can regard the first order second level state of being in PAIN as a functional state.⁵

In this light it might seem that I am proposing a functionalist account of pain. In a sense this is true, and in a sense it is false. I am *not* proposing a functionalist account of *sensations* (nor of perception or propositional attitudes). That is, I am not proposing a theory, of the functional organization of human beings, where sensation states in general are functional states, instantiated or realized by *physical* states. This would be a physicalistic functionalist account of sensations. There are well known problems for such theories as regards phenomenal qualities. These problems do not, of course, trouble my account, since I assume the existence of phenomenal qualities from the outset.

Because of this I think that, at the level of individuals, I do not, after all, have any functionalist account. Indeed, on this level I do not have any account at all. Given that we can assume the existence of sensations, and that they have (perhaps irreducibly) phenomenal qualities, at the level of individuals the concept of PAIN is really superfluous. Any *law* connecting states of PAIN sensation with other states, of the same person, can be equivalently and more directly stated in terms of the phenomenal kind that *has* the property *F*, rather than in terms of PAIN. So at this level, the introduction of the concept of PAIN serves no theoretical purpose.

On an *interpersonal* level, however, the concept of PAIN does serve a theoretical purpose, and here I do think my account is functionalist. I would characterize this account as a kind of *interpersonal functionalism*. In traditional functionalism, a set of actual and possible physical states of an individual give rise to psychological states, because of the fact that the causal relations between the physical states instantiate a psychological pattern; more precisely, a pattern of individual psychology.

In the present suggestion of interpersonal functionalism, on the other hand, a set of actual and possible physical states of an individual give rise to psychological states, because of the fact that these physical states relate the individual to a pattern of *social* psychology. The concept of PAIN allows a theory to generalize over persons, to state laws

⁵This is in agreement with the terminology of Brian Loar in *Mind and Meaning*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981, p 45.

that hold for populations or for the species. We cannot state interpersonal laws in terms of phenomenal kinds, but we can do so in terms of functional kinds, like PAIN. It is the interpersonal application of the concept of pain that is at issue, and I believe that the present conception of public language sensation terms as standing for functional kinds allows a denotational semantics, which would not be possible if those terms stood for phenomenal kinds.

2. Wittgenstein's main views about sensation terms

As I have understood Wittgenstein, and as, to my knowledge, Wittgenstein is standardly interpreted, his views on public language sensation terms are to a large extent inconsistent with the picture given in section 1. I shall be extremely brief, partly for the reason that I do not claim any originality in respect of interpretation.

Main tenets

1. Public language sensation terms are not to be construed as denotational. The term "pain" is not a predicate with pain sensations in its extension. (PI ## 293, 304, 307)
2. Sensations are not objects (entities). (PI ## 253, 293, 294, 296, 304)
3. We do not have any recognitional capacity to discriminate between sensations that are pains and sensations, or other inner states, that are not pains. (PI ## 270, 271, 288, 290)
4. Sincere utterances of (1) and similar sentences do not express judgements. Rather, they are to be understood as acquired pain behaviour. (PI ## 244, 260)
5. Subjects do not know that they are in pain: the concept of knowledge is not applicable. (PI # 246)

Arguments for the tenets

Argument 293

The main argument for tenet 1 is presented in # 293. If the word "pain" denoted pain sensations, then each speaker could know what it denoted in his own case, i.e. what the denotatum were like in his own case, but not what it denoted in the case of other speakers.

Then each speaker would know the meaning of “pain“ only as it applied to himself. It could not be used in sensible linguistic communication. Hence, since the word “pain“ *is* used in sensible linguistic communication, what the denoted sensations are like cannot play any role. It does not matter if a speaker lacks pain sensations altogether, as long as he still uses the word “pain“ in the same way as others do. Hence, sensation terms cannot have a denotational semantics, since if they did, the truth of sentences including them would depend on the existence of, and properties of, the denoted sensations.

Argument 294

This also provides an argument for tenet 2, that sensations aren't entities. It is stressed in ## 294, 296 and 304 that if we are to assume that there are entities corresponding to some concept, like the concept of sensation, then it must matter what those entities are like. Since it does not matter, as shown in Argument 293, the assumption that we have a category of entities is without foundation.

Argument 253

A further argument for tenet 2 is this: if sensations were objects, then our judgements concerning identity and non-identity of sensations would be in need of a criterion of identity (# 253). But our certainty concerning the non-identity of different subjects' sensations is not based on any such criterion. Rather it is, by convention, constitutive of our concept of sensation that people don't share sensations (# 248).

Argument 270

The main independent argument for tenet 3, that we lack recognitional capacity for sensations, is found in ## 270, 271. The idea is that my ability to judge that my blood pressure is rising without needing to use a manometer, or that I am in pain without needing to observe my behaviour, cannot depend on any ability to recognize sensations (on the basis of their phenomenal qualities). And the reason for this is that it would not matter if I constantly misremembered and misclassified my sensations, as long as my judgements still were in *accord* with the third-person criteria. This shows, Wittgenstein says, that the supposition of *mistake* was a mere illusion.

Argument 288

A second argument is found in # 288. Wittgenstein claims that it does not make sense to

assume someone to be in doubt whether he is or is not in pain. Since this does not make sense, there cannot be any criteria of qualitative identity of sensations. If there were criteria, it would make sense to say things like “I know what pain is, but not whether this is pain“. And in # 290 he claims outright that sensations are not recognized on the basis of criteria.

Moreover, you cannot be mistaken about whether you are in pain, but if it were the case that first-person ascriptions of pain were *based* on recognition, in which case you would be using some criterion of identity, then there *would* be a possibility of mistake.

Tenet 4, that ascriptions of pain to oneself (in the present tense) are not to be seen as judgements, is a corollary of tenet 3. I do not know of any other argument for it.

Likewise, tenet 5, that the concept of knowledge is not applicable in the case of (present tense) first-person ascriptions of pain, is a corollary of tenet 4. # 288 also provides a direct support of it.

This concludes the list of arguments directly concerned with public language sensation terms.

3. The relevance of the private language argument

There is, however, a further question concerning the relation of the private language argument to the tenets about sensations and public language sensation terms. Does the private language argument provide a further support for the listed tenets? Passages in some leading commentaries suggest so. Malcolm Budd writes

And hence also constancy of reference to private objects is not only irrelevant from the point of view of a public language, but it is an incoherent idea. It is not just that essentially private objects cannot play any role in a public language-game: there cannot be a private language-game with words for essentially private objects.⁶

And P.M.S. Hacker writes

[...] the supposition that [first-person utterances, like ‘I have a toothache’] are such descriptions [that describe one’s ‘inner world’ as observation statements describe the ‘public world’] must in the final analysis rest on the intelligibility of private ostensive definition, [...] ⁷

⁶Budd, *Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Psychology*, Routledge, London 1989, p 68.

⁷P.M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein. Meaning and Mind*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1990, p 191.

These quotations indicate that Budd and Hacker take Wittgenstein's theses about public sensation language to rest on, or at least be supported by, the private language argument. But judging from the rest of their commentaries, it is not so clear.

There are, I think, three basic ways to bring the private language argument to bear on these issues.

1) The first way is to take the private language argument to be *directly* applicable to the questions of whether such things as pains are entities, recognizable by subjects having them. That is, the premisses of (some version of) the private language argument not only support the conclusion that private sensation terms are impossible, but also the tenets 1 – 5 in section 2.

This alternative *seems* not to be supported by the text. Judging from what Wittgenstein says in # 256 the private sensation terms he discusses are terms for sensations that do *not* have natural behavioural expressions. Pains do. So the private language argument seems not to be concerned with terms like 'pain'.

But you can take the view that the crucial difference is that between terms that (allegedly) do, and terms that do not, refer to private objects. At least, if you think that the premisses of the private language argument support the view that reference to private objects is impossible, then you have a reason to think that this difference is the crucial one.

As far as I understand Hacker, he thinks at least that there is an overlap between the arguments against private ostensive definition and the arguments for tenets 1 – 5 in section 2.

I return to this in section 5.

2) The second way is to take the private language argument not to be directly applicable, but to apply *indirectly*. You reason as follows:

If sensations were entities or we were able to recognize phenomenal kinds, then private sensation terms *would* also be possible. The private language argument shows that private sensation terms are not possible. Hence sensations are not entities and we do not have the ability to recognize phenomenal kinds.

I think that neither Budd nor Hacker subscribes to this view. And I think it is very problematic. I consider it in section 5.

3) The third way to reason is to let the private language argument *complement* the arguments concerning

There are two possibilities for the views that sensations are entities and that we are able to recognize phenomenal kinds. Either this can

be the case for kinds of sensation that have natural behavioural expressions, like pain, thus for kinds of sensation that are talked about in public language. Or else this can be the case for kinds of sensations that do not have natural behavioural expressions, and for which we can devise private sensation terms. But there are strong (mutually independent) arguments against both possibilities. Hence sensations are not entities and we are not able to recognize phenomenal kinds.

This way of reasoning gives support for Budd's claim cited above: "And hence also constancy of reference to private objects is not only irrelevant from the point of view of a public language, but it is an incoherent idea." It is an incoherent idea, the argument goes, because *both* possibilities have been shown to be incoherent.

But on this view tenets about public language sensation terms and our recognitional capacities in connection with them do not get any support from the private language argument. Because of this I shall not here devote any further attention to the third alternative.

4. Soundness of Wittgenstein's arguments

Here I consider the arguments indicated in section 2, in the order presented there.

Argument 293

This argument is not sound. It is assumed that if a public language sensation term is true of some sensations that are of some phenomenal kind, then its meaning must *consist in* being true of precisely sensations of that phenomenal kind. This is a mistaken assumption. It is not true of "pain" as I have explained it in section 1.

On the present conception of the semantics of "pain", its denotational meaning is no obstacle to sensible communication about pain. Further, the truth of ascriptions of pain *does* depend on the properties of pain sensations, but only insofar as these properties satisfy conditions (have second order properties) that can be stated in public language (see (F)).

Argument 294

Since Argument 293 fails, so does Argument 294, which relies on it. On the present conception, it *is* essential for pain sensations that they are of some phenomenal kind which satisfies certain conditions. If this were not essential, then we *would* not have any reason to regard sensations as entities. But it is.

Argument 253

This argument, I think, is doubly flawed. First, we *do* have criteria of identity of sensations. We can judge identity by causal connections. If two sensations differ in respect of causal connections, then they are numerically distinct.

And surely sensations of different subjects do differ in respect of causal connections. My pain sensations are causally connected to my Pain Behaviour, and to my Pain Inflicting Events. They are *not* causally connected to your Pain Behaviour, nor to your Pain Inflicting Events. Hence my pain sensation are distinct from your pain sensations.

Secondly, this is something we know from *experience*, it is not a matter of convention, not part of the grammar, in Wittgenstein's sense, of the concept of pain. It is, on my view, a matter of grammar, in Wittgenstein's sense, that there be a causal connection between my pain sensations and my Pain Behaviour, and between my pain sensations and my Pain Inflicting Events, but it can hardly be thought to be part of grammar that there is *not* also such connections between my pain sensations and your Pain Behaviour and Pain Inflicting Events. Rather, this is something experience teaches us.

Argument 270

As I understand it, this argument has the following structure

1. If first-person ascriptions express judgements, then *Necessarily* (If first-person ascriptions largely cohere with third-person criteria, then first-person ascriptions are largely true)
2. It is not the case that: *Necessarily* (If first-person ascriptions largely cohere with third-person criteria, then first-person ascriptions are largely true)
3. Hence, first-person ascriptions do not express judgements

I do not think it is sound. Depending on how the modal qualification is understood, I either accept premiss 1 and reject premiss 2, or else accept premiss 2 and reject premiss 1.

Let's first understand the sentence prefix "*Necessarily*" as indicating a conceptual or theoretical connection. On this understanding I would say that "*Necessarily* (if *A*, then *B*)" is true provided the *inference* from *A* to *B* is well motivated on general grounds.

Given an interpretation along these lines I accept premiss 1. I argue as follows. First, the reason we have for *thinking* that first-person ascriptions express judgements, is that we have a reason for thinking that the judgements expressed are largely *true*. If we did not have a capacity recognize sensations, i.e. to judge correctly in a majority of cases, we could not

credit ourselves with any conception of phenomenal kinds at all. This is in accordance with Wittgenstein's considerations about rule following (cf. PI # 242). I also think that those considerations justify the stronger claim:

- a) If first-person ascriptions express judgements, then there is a good *reason* for thinking that first-person ascriptions are largely true

Again, if we *know* that there is not a sufficiently good reason for thinking that first-person ascriptions are largely true, then we have a reason for *rejecting* the assumption that first-person ascriptions express judgements.

Second, we do not have sufficient ground for thinking that first-person ascriptions are largely true, *unless* we are licensed to infer it from the premiss that first-person ascriptions largely cohere with third-person criteria.

What supports such this inference? Well, we may, for instance, regard it as an inference to the *best explanation*. Then we have this fact to be explained: without relying on third-person criteria we are able to ascribe sensations to ourselves in *accordance* with third-person criteria. And you may think that the best explanation of this fact is that we have the ability to recognize our own sensations. If you *do* think so, then you have a reason to accept the inference, and since the premiss is clearly true, you have a reason to accept the conclusion, i.e. the conclusion that first-person ascriptions are largely true.

The main point is that *unless* we have *some* such reason to accept the inference, we do not have good enough a reason for thinking that first-person ascriptions are largely true. It is not enough to trust our impressions, for instance my impression that I manage to recognize sensations. Hence, if there *is* a good reason for the conclusion, then there *is* a good reason for the inference. But, on the present conception of the modality, there is a good reason for the inference if, and only if,

Necessarily (If first-person ascriptions largely cohere with third-person criteria, then first-person ascriptions are largely true)

is *true*. Hence, we have

- b) If there is a good reason for thinking that first-person ascriptions are largely true, then *Necessarily* (If first-person ascriptions largely cohere with third-person criteria, then first-person ascriptions are largely true)

Putting a) and b) together we get premiss 1.

Then we come to premiss 2. On the present interpretation, I think premiss 2 fails. It fails

because there *is* a good reason for the inference. For more about this, see section 6.

But it is not unreasonable to suppose that Wittgenstein meant something else, namely that it is *logically consistent* that, or that we can *imagine* that, first-person ascriptions largely cohere with third-person criteria while yet being wrong *all the time*. I am not so certain about what we can imagine, but the assumption is clearly logically consistent. So on this interpretation premiss 2 is acceptable.

But we still do not have a sound argument, because on this interpretation premiss 1 fails. There is no reason whatsoever to think that the thesis (that first-person ascriptions express judgements) is false, or lack justification, just because it is *logically consistent*, or because we can *imagine*, that: first-person ascriptions largely cohere with third-person criteria while yet being wrong all the time. This is as if we were to say the following: we can *imagine* that elementary particles behave in ways other than those that explain macrolevel physical phenomena, and hence we have no reason to believe in the existence of elementary particles. What may be logically consistent, and what we may claim to be able to imagine, is simply not relevant.

Hence I think that Argument 270 fails.

Argument 288

In this argument, two things are ruled out. On the one hand the possibility of *doubting* whether a particular sensation is a pain, and on the other hand the possibility of *being mistaken* about whether a particular sensation is a pain. And then it is claimed that if there *were* criteria for recognizing pain sensations, both doubt and mistakes *would* be possible.

Let us clear one case out of our way. It is possible to doubt in borderline cases whether something is, is to be *counted* as, a pain. This is readily admitted e.g. by Hacker.⁸ The crucial possibility is that of having doubts, and being mistaken, about central cases.

I do *not* think it is ruled out that you can be in doubt, and be mistaken, about whether some particular sensation of yours is a pain. It is not conceptually impossible. To begin with, it is pretty clear that in the case of very basic perceptual judgements there is a very close connection between on the one hand grasp of a concept and, on the other, a virtually infallible ability to apply it. Suppose, for instance that an ordinary speaker hits a rock with his fist. The result is the expected one, except that the speaker comments that the rock is soft (as a marshmallow). If this were to be repeated once or twice and if I were convinced

⁸op. cit. p 57.

that the speaker was sincere, then I would suspect that at least part of his command of the concept of *softness*, or at least of the use of the word “soft“, somehow had been lost.

Mistakes are extremely rare, even odd, and call for explanation. Clearly,

(3) He thought it was [felt like] a pain, but it was really a tickle

has a very odd ring to it, but so has

(4) He thought it felt soft, but it was really hard

We clearly need better reasons than the impression of strangeness for concluding that (3) is *nonsense* (conceptually, or grammatically, excluded), while (4) is merely unusual.

But perhaps there are better reasons. Perhaps (4) can have a reasonable explanation while (3) cannot. As regards (4), you could be mistaken once, perhaps because of some signalling incident along the way from the sensory receptor to the relevant part of the brain. This would explain why the subject got the *impression* of softness even though what he touched was in fact hard. So, although we would indeed be baffled by (4), we can also think of some explanation of the mistake that would remove its strangeness. When we explain a mistake, we must show that some connection between the final judgement and what normally make such judgements correct has been severed. In this case what has been severed is the *normal* connection between the impression (softness-impression) and what it is an impression of (softness). And we may appeal to neurobiology for explaining the failure of this connection.

But, of course, when it comes to the sensations or the impressions themselves, there is no such distinction between appearance and reality to be made. So we cannot in the same way explain how something could feel like a pain, and yet be a tickle.

Still I think this can be satisfactorily explained. Remember that, on my explanation, the concept of pain is not a concept of a particular *phenomenal* kind of sensation. As far as my explanation goes, the phenomenal qualities of different subjects' pain sensations can be as unlike as may be. It is still the same concept of pain that applies to them. Now a speaker can, on some occasion, perhaps because of some neurological accident, misremember *which* phenomenal quality his pain sensations have. He can still be in perfect command of the concept of pain, since it is not part of the *meaning* of “pain“ that his pain sensations have precisely *that* phenomenal quality. So he can still have the conception of the

connection between pains and Pain Behaviour, and between pains and Pain Inflicting Events, and thus command the general concept of being a pain sensation. Then, if he misremembers which phenomenal kind his pain sensations are of, he *falsely believes* some sensation to be a pain sensation. Thus mistakes are possible. Here what is severed is not the connection between the impression and what it is an impression of, as in perceptual mistakes, but the connection between command of the general concept and ability to recognize the phenomenal kind.⁹

So now we have an explanation of the possibility of error in first-person ascriptions of pain. That takes care of half of Argument 288. The other half concerns doubt, and, I assume, only with sincere and justified doubt, as opposed to sceptical doubt. Sceptical doubt has its own general problems, and I shall not be concerned with those. I take Argument 288 to advance the view that as regards first-person ascriptions of pain, sincere, motivated doubt is impossible.

There are two kinds of reason for that view. The first is to appeal to the impossibility of mistakes. If mistakes were impossible on conceptual grounds, it would not make sense to doubt the correctness of one's first-person ascriptions. But my explanation of the possibility of mistakes eliminates *that* reason against the possibility of doubt. The other reason would be that even if mistakes *were* possible no speaker would ever have a reason for *believing* in the incorrectness of his own first-person ascriptions, and hence no justification for doubting either.

Consider

(5) This object *feels* soft, but it is hard

(5) is even more strange than (4). Even if someone could make a mistake of this kind, under what circumstances would you actually *believe* that your impression was deceiving you? Well, if your tactile sense started to deceive you systematically, you would begin to notice an incoherence between the testimonies of your tactile impressions, on the one hand, and your experience (theory of the world), as well as other peoples' judgements, on the other. In that case you might begin to doubt the veridicality of new tactile impressions.

Could there be something similar in the case of first-person ascriptions of pain? Yes. Consider the kind of mistake I indicated as regards first-person ascriptions of pain. I falsely

⁹In fact, I do think that mistakes can be explained even for terms that directly denote phenomenal kinds of sensation, but *this* requires the addition of a temporal externalism of thought content, which is not required in the case of pain.

believe sensations of *this* phenomenal kind to be pain sensations. But clearly, I cannot make very *many* mistakes of the same kind, because I will start to discover that the required lawlike connections do *not* obtain for this kind of sensation. My first-person ascriptions may cease to cohere with third-person ascriptions of pain to me. If that happens I may justifiably come to doubt that new inclinations to predicate *pain* of particular sensations are acceptable. Since first-person ascriptions of pain are constrained, on the present model, by their connections to third-person criteria, the possibility of lack of coherence with third-person criteria explains the possibility of justified and sincere doubt.

Hence I think that Argument 288 fails.

This completes the treatment of the arguments in section 2.

5. Soundness of arguments from the impossibility of private languages

In section 3 I noted two ways in which the private language argument could support Wittgenstein's views concerning public language sensation terms. There was the direct way and the indirect way. I shall consider them in this order.

Direct applicability of the private language argument

Whether or not the private language argument supports the denial of a denotational semantics for public language sensation terms depends, unsurprisingly, on what the private language argument is. It is clear, however, that on the *standard* interpretation what supports the conclusion of the private language argument does not support the conclusion about public language sensation terms.

On (what I take to be) the standard interpretation the key element in the considerations against the possibility of private sensation terms is the lack of an independent standard. The private linguist needs an independent standard to check his applications of his private term against. Without such a standard

[...] whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we cannot talk about 'right'¹⁰

Again, in Malcolm Budd's words

¹⁰PI #258

And since his use of 'S' is entirely unconstrained, 'S' is not a sign whose use is rule-governed.¹¹

This reason against the possibility of private sensation terms is *not* also a reason against the possibility of a denotational semantics for public language sensation terms. And it isn't a reason simply because the use of public language sensation terms for classifying one's own sensations *is* constrained by public criteria. As I have explained the concept of pain the speaker's first-person ascriptions must, *on the whole*, conform to the third-person criteria for ascriptions of pain. If his first-person ascriptions deviate too often or in too obvious cases (screaming of pain while denying that he has any) he will no longer be considered an authority on applying the concept of pain to his own states. And, provided he still understands the nature of the general concept, and notices the incoherence, he will have to change his ways, or cease to regard *himself* as an authority.

There will not, of course, be such a thing as a *sample* of pain which the speaker can measure each of his first-person ascriptions of pain against, as you can test your colour judgements against a colour chart. But the possibility of testing your judgements against a sample is not the only way your judgements can be constrained.

So on what I take to be the *standard* interpretation the premisses of the private language argument do not support the conclusion that we cannot recognize phenomenal kinds or that we cannot give a denotational semantics for public language sensation terms.

On P.M.S. Hacker's interpretation, the stress is not on lack of constraints in general, but on lack of constraints of a particular kind, those that stem from comparisons with *samples* of sensations. Hacker notes that we cannot just use a single one-time sensation as a sample, because that sensation, once gone, is irretrievably lost, and cannot be used for comparison. But he goes on to claim that it cannot do either with persisting sensations, nor with reproducible sensations (the pain one get's from pricking oneself with a pin).

The reason for this is that even if we used persisting or reproducible sensations as samples, this would not do, since we would not be able to notice if there were a change *in the sample*. And the reason we could not notice this is that "there is no such thing as being more or less skillful in distinguishing the sameness or difference of a pain"¹², and again that

¹¹Budd, op. cit. p 60.

¹²Hacker, op. cit. p 107.

there cannot be any *technique of comparison* between sensations.¹³

There cannot be such a technique because the *very idea* is unintelligible. And the idea is unintelligible because it presupposes that it makes sense to compare *wrongly*. But this does not make sense, for it does not make sense to say “I thought I had a pain, but I was mistaken“.¹⁴

So far as I can make out, this is the rock bottom of Hacker’s version of the private language argument. Thus, Hacker uses the same argument against the possibility of private sensation terms as against the possibility of recognizing sensations as falling under public language concepts. But apparently it all rests on judgements that statements like “I thought I had a pain, but I was mistaken“ are nonsense. As is clear from section 4, I don’t agree that such statements are nonsense.

Indirect applicability of the private language argument

On this alternative you argue for a conditional like

- (6) *If recognition of phenomenal kinds were possible, then private ostensive definitions would also be possible*

Secondly, you appeal to the private language argument for support of the negation of the consequent of (6), i.e. for the impossibility of private ostensive definitions. Third, you conclude, by *modus tollens*, the negation of the antecedent of (6), i.e. that recognition of phenomenal kinds is not possible.

It is not easy to see how to argue for the conditional. I know of only one reasonably good candidate. On that proposal you have to deviate a bit from the standard interpretation of the private language argument. On this version of the private language argument the possibility of a private ostensive definition is not directly refuted by the lack of an independent standard. You take the view that if a private ostensive definition of some term ‘S’ actually had been given, it would not *matter* that the speaker could not check his own applications of ‘S’. These applications would be either correct or incorrect nevertheless. It would only depend on whether they in fact corresponded with the definition once given.

¹³ibid. p 106.

¹⁴ibid. p 106.

But, the argument goes on, private ostensive definitions are not possible in the first place. For in order to be able to give such a definition you must be able to *intend* the defined term to apply in some particular way: you must have some standard of sameness of sensations in *mind*. But you can *have* such an intention if, and only if, you already *have* the capacity to recognize phenomenal kinds. Without the background of having that capacity nothing in your mind could *count* as an intention to apply a term 'S' to some particular phenomenal kind.

The argument then concludes like this: but it is impossible to have a capacity to recognize phenomenal kinds. As already shown you cannot acquire that capacity by way of devising a private ostensive definition. And as (some) *independent* arguments show, you cannot have that capacity in connection with public language sensation terms either. In short, you cannot have it at all.

This version of the private language argument actually supports (6). For on this conception, if you have the capacity to recognize phenomenal kinds you also have what is needed for introducing private sensations terms. In particular, if successful first-person ascriptions of pain and other sensations rely on recognition of phenomenal kinds, then this recognitional capacity can form the background of new, even private, sensation terms.¹⁵

The problem is that on this version of the private language argument, which gives you support for (6), you do not have support for applying *modus tollens* to (6). For on this version the private language argument relies entirely on *independent* arguments against the possibility of recognizing phenomenal kinds in connection with using public language sensation terms. So you don't get what you wanted in the first place, i.e. *new* support against the possibility of recognizing phenomenal kinds.

What you need is a reason for accepting (6) that does not at the same time make the argument for the negation of the consequent, i.e. the private language argument, *depend* on the negation of the antecedent. The suggested version of the private language argument did not provide such a reason.

And you may well suspect that there is none to be had. For, it seems that the basis for asserting (6) would be either that the reasoning about public sensation terms somehow

¹⁵Hacker in fact goes some (short) way in this direction when he writes: "Numerous bodily sensations, e.g. of pressure, of swelling, sensations of tingling, of a hot flush, of heartburn, etc. have little if any distinctive, differentiating natural expression. Their primary behavioural manifestation is linguistic. [...] Nevertheless, these more refined forms of verbal expressive behaviour are rooted in the more primitive ones. Once the primitive linguistic expression is grafted onto the natural expressive behaviour, further linguistic extensions grow." *op. cit.* pp. 195-96.

depends on the reasoning about private ones, or that the converse holds. But the first case is the case of direct applicability of the private language argument, and this case is already dismissed (since the use of a public term is constrained, and the lack of constraint is supposed to be the crucial feature of the use of the private term). And if the dependence is the converse one, then we have the situation exemplified above: a conclusive argument about public sensation terms is already presupposed in the acceptance of the private language argument. Thus, if there is indirect evidence, from the private language argument, then it must be of a different nature. So far I don't know of any.

6. Reasons for the present view of sensation concepts

Let me end with a few remarks about what positive support there is for conceiving e.g. pain as a functional kind, as spelled out in section 1.

First of all there is the phenomenological evidence for the thesis that we recognize phenomenal kinds. It clearly *seems* to me that I recognize kinds of sensation, and I suppose that most speakers have a corresponding impression. This is important, for it would be too farfetched to postulate a capacity of recognition without it.

But secondly there is the issue of explaining linguistic communication. How is it possible, in general, that speakers manage to understand what other speakers mean by their words? How is it possible that speakers learn to associate the same meanings with the same expressions, and also know that they do? And how, in particular, is it possible for speakers to learn to associate the same meaning with the noun 'pain', and other public sensation terms, and also know that they do? I claim that my view on sensation terms does offer a good explanation, or part of a good explanation, of this, and that it is better than what can be provided by Wittgenstein's view.

Let me first state, in a somewhat naïve fashion, my view of how we learn the concept of pain. I shall then consider Wittgenstein's criticism of that picture, and then show why my account, with the present conception pain as a functional kind, goes free of that criticism. I shall then move on to considering explanatory value.

My picture of the acquisition of the concept of pain is this. On the basis of my overt Pain Behaviour, others ascribe to me the state of being in pain. They use, *inter alia*, the word 'pain' in doing so. On the basis of this I learn to associate this word with a kind of my own sensations. I associate 'pain' with my pain sensations, since the phenomenal quality of my

pain sensations is the most salient feature of the world, as I experience it, when 'pain' is predicated of me. And because of my ability to recognize phenomenal kinds I learn, furthermore, to discriminate between my sensations by using that same word. I count some sensations as pains, and others as non-pains.

I also learn, from others, the practice of applying the word 'pain' predicatively to others, on the basis of observing Pain Behaviour and Pain Inflicting Events. I further assume that when others are in pain, by the behavioural lights, they are experiencing the same as I experience when I am in pain. In taking this stance towards others I project from my own case. Doing so comes natural to me, given that others show very similar Pain Behaviour as reactions to very similar Pain Inflicting Events (it comes all the more natural as others *encourage* me precisely to project from my own case, for the purpose of developing compassion). And the mere fact that the same word is used in all cases makes it overwhelmingly natural for me to think that it is the same kind of phenomenon that occurs in all these cases.

In this way a seemingly coherent picture of sensations develops: people react with the same kind of sensation, e.g. pain, to Pain Inflicting Events, and people typically reveal having sensations of that kind by way of Pain Behaviour. This picture is naïve, of course, but I think it is basically right.

However, in addition to the other arguments discussed here, Wittgenstein has a reason for rejecting this picture of acquiring the concept of pain. In particular, he opposes the idea that I can come to understand what it is for others to have pain by way of *projecting from my own case*. In PI # 302 Wittgenstein says that this is no easy task. It requires me to imagine, on the model of sensations that *I feel*, sensations that I *don't* feel. This is something quite different from imagining, say, sensations in my leg on the model of sensations in my arm.

Wittgenstein says that the task is not easy. He does not say that it is impossible. So # 302 is not presented as a straightforward argument against the possibility of understanding by projection. Nonetheless an argument can be extracted: nothing that I don't feel can be counted as *like* anything that I feel. The structure is this. I am being asked to imagine a thing *B*. *B* is supposed to be just like a familiar other thing *A*, except for one detail. *B* lacks a certain feature *F* which *A* has. But now having the feature *F* is so integral to being like *A* that *nothing* (or, if anything, then everything) could be counted as being just like *A* except for not having *F*. It is like being asked to imagine something which looks exactly like the

Eiffel tower, except for differing in size, shape and colour. If you take away the crucial features, then nothing can count as successful imagining.¹⁶

I think there are two problems with this argument. The first problem is the concentration on *imagination*. Our original task was to *understand*, on the model of my own sensations, what it is for others to have sensations. There is no obvious reason why such an understanding must proceed by way of imagining other persons' sensations. I am only required to understand from my own case what it is to *have* a sensation. This is what I project from. I need not project my own *sensations* on another person.

But suppose that pain, and other well-known kinds of sensation, were *phenomenal* kinds. In that case talk of imagination is beside the point, since in that case I could not even *conceive* of other persons as having pain. I would have to understand what it is for you to have a sensation of the same kind as mine, i.e. of the same *phenomenal* kind as mine, and this I cannot do, since that does not even make sense (we have assumed). If it does not make sense to think that your pain and my pain can be phenomenally similar, then I cannot conceive of your pain as being of the same phenomenal kind as mine. And if my pain is a phenomenal kind, then I cannot even conceive of you as having pain.

So there *would* be a good argument against projecting from one's own case, if public language sensation terms denoted phenomenal kinds. The second problem of the argument is that, so understood, it ignores the possibility functional kinds of sensation. If pain is a functional kind, then I *can* conceive of you as having pain, i.e. as having what I have when I am in pain, i.e. as having a sensation which is related to your Pain Behaviour as my pain sensations are related to my Pain Behaviour, etc. There is no problem about projection. Thus, the argument dissolves.

I am not, of course, claiming that natural language speakers do acquire the conception of pain as a functional kind of sensation. On the contrary, I believe that it is part of the naïve picture of sensations that speakers do acquire the belief, at least early on, that there is a real, phenomenal similarity between their sensations and others'. My point is that even if we reject *this* part of the naïve picture, enough *remains* in that picture for understanding what it is for others to have sensations.

¹⁶Maybe Wittgenstein had something else in mind, viz. that for me to imagine a sensation is *eo ipso* to imagine it as being mine, i.e. one that I feel. This would have nothing to do with intersubjective similarity, but only with the ineliminability of the imagining subject. I doubt that it is impossible for me to imagine a sensation as not *felt* by me, but, even if it is, this does not matter here, since imagining is not what is at stake.

Finally, this does serve to *explain* how communication with public language sensation terms can be successful. For, on the present model, a speaker first learns to associate his own pain sensations with the word ‘pain’, and then proceeds to assume the existence of analogous sensations, again associated with ‘pain’, in others. Since everyone does the same, and since everyone does have pain sensations that are analogous everyone else’s pain sensations, the word ‘pain’ acquires a coherent shared interpretation. And thus it is part of the general explanation of the success of linguistic communication among speakers of English that ‘pain’ does refer to pain sensations (that pain sensations satisfy “*x* is a pain”). The assumption that ‘pain’ refers to pain sensations explains the coherence of first and third-person pain ascriptions, i.e. it explains why these are judgements involving the same concept. In both first-person and third-person pain ascriptions it is claimed that pain sensations occur, but the basis for the judgements are different.

Wittgenstein does, however, have an explanation that competes with the present one. Of course, Wittgenstein did not look kindly upon explanations in philosophy, but I still think that his view on the meaning of sensation terms can serve an explanatory purpose. As already noted, Wittgenstein thinks that meaningful use of sensation terms does *not* include use in first person present tense. First person present tense use of ‘pain’ is an acquired pain behaviour, which replaces a more primitive behaviour (PI ## 244, 289, 290). It is not a descriptive use, based on criteria, as are the uses in other persons, tenses and moods. First-person (present tense) pain ascriptions are not applications of the concept of pain, and do not express judgements.¹⁷ And then, if first person use is excluded in this way, the (remaining part of the) use of sensation terms can be explained wholly in terms of third person criteria. At least this is the position I assign to the wittgensteinian.

Given these two explanations, I think that the denotational one has the edge. I have three reasons, all concerning first person use. First, I think that my explanation accords better with pre-theoretic intuitions about first person use as reports of sensations. Secondly, I think it is generally desirable to assign a good descriptive sense to sentences that have the surface grammar of descriptions, and are uttered with the surface illocutionary force of assertions, rather than dismissing it as a grammatical illusion (cf PI # 307), since only this line will give a natural account of the *embedded* use of such sentences, e.g. as antecedents

¹⁷To what extent is it possible to accept e.g. that first-person pain ascriptions are true or false descriptions while still denying that sensations are entities? You may wish to do without sensations as entities just for the reason of a general ontological parsimony. This was stressed to me by Torbjörn Tännsjö. Discussion of this must be deferred to another occasion.

of conditionals, and as occurring with anaphoric links to other sentences. And third, as noted in section 4 (in consideration of Argument 270), the denotational explanation has the additional advantage of yielding an *explanation* of the coherence of first person and third person ascriptions, rather than taking it as brute, inexplicable fact. Hence, if these two are the explanations we have, Inference to the Best Explanation dictates that we accept the conclusion that public language sensation terms do have a denotational semantics, and that we can recognize phenomenal kinds.¹⁸

Department of Philosophy, Stockholm University¹⁹

References

- Budd, Malcolm, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Psychology*, Routledge, London 1989
- Hacker, P.M.S., *Wittgenstein. Meaning and Mind*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1990
- Loar, Brian, *Mind and Meaning*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1981
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd edition Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1967

¹⁸It is an open question how much else there is in Wittgenstein's late philosophy that conflicts with the present views. For instance, it is not clear to me to what extent the appeal to phenomenal kinds, even if we disregard privacy, is disallowed by Wittgenstein's considerations about rule following. I thank Gunnar Svensson for drawing my attention to this.

¹⁹I am indebted to Per Martin-Löf, Dag Prawitz, Gunnar Svensson, Torbjörn Tännsjö and Dag Westerståh .