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WITTGENSTEIN ON SENSATION AND 'SEEING-AS'

But I said that I was going to distinguish two expressions, one for the 'surface' and one for 'what is below the surface' – only remember that these expressions themselves correspond just to a *picture*, not to its usage. It is just as misleading to say that there is just the surface and nothing underneath it, as that there is something below the surface and that there isn't just the surface.¹

Although Wittgenstein's philosophy of mind has given rise to a vast body of critical literature, his discussion of sensation has so far received only piecemeal treatment. In fact, the focus of commentators has been so much on the private-language argument that it may appear as if Wittgenstein had little else to say relevant to the topic of sensation. Although I shall of course pay heed to that argument, my main concern is to sketch an overview of Wittgenstein's approach to sensation. One special virtue I should like to claim for it is that it provides some important thematic continuity between the two parts of the *Philosophical Investigations*.² Another feature is that it avoids imputing to Wittgenstein various traditional philosophical doctrines which some of his critics, as well as some of his followers, claim to find in the later writings.

I have just suggested that Wittgenstein's account of sensation is significantly different from what may be found in traditional philosophical theories. Nevertheless, some writers have viewed Wittgenstein as adopting a behavioristic analysis of mental phenomena; others have credited him with preserving private, inner mental process, and introducing 'criteria' to bridge the gap between mind and behavior. If what I have to say in the first part of this essay is correct, it follows that both of these interpretations are fundamentally in error, and that both errors have a common source.

In Part II, I argue that a proper understanding of Wittgenstein's approach to sensation requires careful attention to his discussion of 'seeing-as'. The same point, I believe, could also be made concerning

his approach to other mental phenomena, but space permits only a hint of the argument for that conclusion.

1. DESTRUCTION OF THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

At the beginning of the *Blue Book*, Wittgenstein takes note of 'one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it'.³ And it is certainly true that major philosophical efforts have been directed toward answering such questions as 'What is a sensation?' or 'What is a pain?' Once these questions are posed, the structure of ensuing philosophical discussion is pretty well fixed. For the question itself contains the assumption that sensations (or pains) must consist in something, and that the task of philosophy is to say what that 'something' is. This assumption is the common property of dualism and reductive materialism, and such theories constructed on its basis are excellent examples of what Wittgenstein refers to as *Luftgebäude* (*PI* 118).

According to a Cartesian view of mind, sensations are inner goings-on, knowable and nameable by their possessor, and logically inaccessible in both respects to any outside observer. Sensation discourse is therefore held to be necessarily unintelligible to anyone except the sensation's owner (*PI* 243). Underlying this view is the assumption that the question 'What is a sensation?' is legitimate – legitimate in the sense that a convincing answer would specify the entities which are sensations. And it is precisely this assumption which Wittgenstein wishes to attack. The attack has two components. One of them consists in taking the assumption at face value, and showing that it leads to insuperable problems. The other argues that the assumption itself is fundamentally misconceived – that it arises out of a failure to understand the grammar of sensation words. Although I want to focus largely on the latter strategy, I shall begin by giving a description of the former.

Let us assume for a moment that the philosophical picture of sensations as private, inner processes (states, objects) is correct. Although my sensations are inaccessible to others, they are at least held to be manifest to me. But if this is so, it should follow that I can name my sensations as they occur, and recognize them when they subsequently reappear. Wittgenstein's celebrated private language argument is directed against this very point:

Can I point to the sensation? Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation – and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. – But what is this ceremony for? for that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign. – Well, that is done precisely by the concentrating of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connexion between the sign and the sensation. – But 'I impress it on myself' can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'. (*PI* 258, cf. *NFL* 296 and *BB* 69, 172)

The point here is not that memory can be unreliable, but rather that the ostensive procedure just described fails to pick out anything; *a fortiori*, it fails to pick out anything which could be remembered.⁴ 'When one says "He gave a name to his sensation" one forgets that a great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense' (*PI* 257). If, for example, I look up into the air and say 'The sky is moo', I have not by that ceremony accomplished anything which could later be characterized as 'remembering the meaning of "moo" '.

Thus far, the problem with private ostensive definition seems to have a counterpart in public ostensive definition: the mere utterance of a sound in the presence of an object does not serve to determine the use of that sound.⁵ Nevertheless, public ostensive definitions, assisted by additional features, do eventually succeed; the application of a sound in the public arena is provided by a variety of circumstances in which it is uttered. Among other things, the public speaker must be able to specify the object receiving ostensive definition. One way in which he can do this is by using kind-words. But 'sensation' will not work as a kind-word for the *private* theorist, since it is borrowed from the public domain. And any putatively private kind-word would meet the original difficulty concerning private ostensive definition (cf. *PI* 261).

Beyond specification of the object to be defined, another necessary condition of a sound's being a name is *consistency* in usage. And what counts as consistent usage or (equivalently) a rule of application is determined by human agreement (cf. *PI* 224 on the connection between these two concepts). Using a term consistently, like continuing a numerical series correctly, is a matter of following the procedures to which human beings in fact adhere. Of course, although human agreement enters into the situations where sounds are invested with meaning, it need never be *mentioned* in those situations:

Our language-game only works, of course, when a certain agreement prevails, but the *concept* of agreement does not enter into the language-game. If agreement were universal, we should be quite unacquainted with the concept of it.⁶

Furthermore, the agreement necessary for language is not at bottom the result of human *decisions*:

I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination.⁷

Given that consistency in application is required for a sound to function referentially, and given also that what counts as consistent application is determined by human agreement, we can begin to see why someone could not successfully make private ostensive definitions. For “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’ (*PI* 202). In other words, since the ‘private’ realm rules out the possibility of human agreement (its language is in principle unteachable) it *ipso facto* excludes a feature essential for distinguishing names from random noises. Therefore, names of sensations could not consist merely if (private) sounds uttered in the presence of private objects. To generate a workable sensation language, publicity must be brought into play.⁸

Suppose, however, that someone has mastered the nonpsychological areas of public language. He knows, then, what distinguishes particular random sounds from real words in his language. Could he not simply extend this knowledge into the private realm? Wittgenstein considers this point:

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

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

Although this passage (like *PI* 258) is often interpreted as a comment on memory or as a commitment to Verificationism, its intention is actually quite different. Wittgenstein's opponent is assuming that 'subjective justification' means 'following the same procedure privately that I follow in cases of public justification'. But as we have already seen, the latter requires human agreement, and this is what is lacking in the private realm. The point can be made more clearly if we imagine what the 'table' in *PI* 265 might look like:

Name	Sensation
E ₁ ----->	S ₁
E ₂ ----->	S ₂
E ₃ ----->	S ₃

Now, even if one had a mental image like this, the problem still arises as to how it is to be used. For as *PI* 86 makes clear, tables are susceptible to various interpretations. 'But,' someone may reply, 'since you have already granted a mastery of public (nonpsychological) language, the answer to this is obvious. You use the private table in the same way as you would use a public table.'

This suggestion, however attractive it first appears, turns out to be completely unsatisfactory. For what does it mean to do *the same thing* (cf. *PI* 350)? There is no general answer to this question, but in particular cases what counts as doing the same thing is (as has already been suggested) a matter of human agreement. But since the private table in *PI* 265 involves features which are assumed to be in principle incommunicable, there is no opportunity for human agreement to dictate that it is or is not being used in the same way that public tables are used. Thus, the notion of subjective justification goes by the board, and the idea of consistent usage in the purely private realm is shown to be an illusion. The problem is not that a memory of the meaning of 'E' stands in need of verification, but rather that there is nothing *which* is the meaning of 'E', and consequently nothing which is the memory of the meaning of 'E'. The mental image just depicted cannot be tested for

correctness because it is not a memory of anything. Even an infallible memory could provide no relief from this objection.

The line of argument just outlined completes Wittgenstein's *reductio ad absurdum* of the name/object sensation model. I want now to consider the second major component of his attack on the traditional philosophical picture of sensations as inner processes. Here, the name/object model is no longer granted for the sake of (a *reductio*) argument; rather, Wittgenstein seeks to exorcise that picture, which continues to linger in our thought.

It has already been suggested that a major component of the Cartesian view of mind is the assumption that the sensations are entities of some sort which serve as the referent of sensation language. For if this were not the case, one might query, how could sensation language ever get under way?

This question is the same as: how does the human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations? – of the word 'pain' for example. Here is one possibility: words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain-behaviour. (*PI* 244)

This passage is of great importance, but it has been given a variety of interpretations. Here I shall add mine. The first point to notice is that Wittgenstein does not set forth these ideas as a doctrine, but rather as 'a possibility' (*eine Möglichkeit*). So regarded, the 'possibility' shows us that as philosophers we are not *required* to regard sensation words as names for private inner events, and consequently that the picture which underlies the Cartesian outlook is one that *can* be rejected. There are, after all, no Cartesian private entities present in *PI* 244. What we are given is merely a transition from spontaneous expressive behavior to a language-game which largely supplants that behavior. Notice also the context which surrounds *PI* 244: in *PI* 243 sensations are regarded *ex hypothesi* as private objects with private names, and in *PI* 245 we are reminded that such a view amounts to using 'language to get between pain and its expression'. The main purpose of *PI* 244 is to indicate that a perspective is available which does not drive a wedge between sensation and its expression. No doubt there are other perspectives which might accomplish the same end, but Wittgenstein's primary aim here is to remove a picture which dominates philosophical thought; not to insist on the propriety of some particular replacement. As Wittgenstein elsewhere remarks:

I wanted to put that picture before him, and his *acceptance* of the picture CONSISTS IN his now being inclined to regard a given case differently: that is, to compare it with *this* rather than *that* set of pictures. I have changed his *way of looking at things*. (PI 144 or Z, 461, capitalized emphasis added)

The 'proposal' or 'new picture' in PI 244, therefore, amounts to a forceful rejection of the name/object sensation model. It need not be construed as bearing Wittgenstein's stamp of approval, however.⁹ For language-games, it should be recalled, are 'set up as *objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language by way not only of similarities, but also of *dissimilarities*'. (PI 130, latter emphasis added)

Both the primitive behavior and the linguistic behavior described in PI 244 involve the behavioral *expression of sensation*. Since this idea plays a central role in Wittgenstein's approach to sensation, I will soon consider it in some detail. Here it will be helpful to introduce a terminological convention. In what follows, I shall hyphenate 'expression-of-sensation' as an indicator that the contained words cannot be treated as independently referential.¹⁰ Thus, the question 'What entity is referred to by the name "sensation"?' is disallowed. In this respect, the phrase 'expression-of-sensation' has a grammar very different from that of superficially analogous phrases such as 'tomb of Tutankhamen'. The latter embodies a genuine distinction between inner and outer, but this picture will not give an accurate account of how 'expression-of-sensation' functions. The temptation to think that the phrases *do* have analogous uses is doubtless reinforced by the fact that some of their cognates also have superficially analogous grammars. For example, 'Socrates has a pain' seems akin to 'King Tut has a curved spine', and since spines are (inner) objects which can be named, it might be assumed that in some similar way pains are too (cf. BB 48–53; PI 311–312). But expressions-of-sensation are not like signs which a shopkeeper might put on his door in order to indicate whether he is inside (cf. NFL 279–280).

Still, the urge to think otherwise persists almost inexorably, and hardly abates with Wittgenstein's suggestion that we 'put the expression of our experience in place of the experience' (BB 184). For this again seems to thwart an important philosophical question about the nature of 'sensations themselves', and perhaps even to reduce sensations to their expression:

'But you will surely admit that there is a difference between pain-behaviour accompanied by pain and pain-behaviour without any pain?' – Admit it? What greater difference could there be? – 'And yet you again and again reach the conclusion that the sensation itself is a *nothing*.' – Not at all. It is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either! The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said. We have only rejected the grammar which tries to force itself on us here. (*PI* 304)

This passage is not as paradoxical as it first appears. Wittgenstein's claim that 'the sensation itself . . . is not a *something*' is a way of saying that talk about sensation should not be construed on the name/object model. Thus, there is not a 'something' referred to by the traditional philosopher's phrase 'sensation itself'. On the other hand, a sensation 'is not a *nothing*', since in ordinary parlance it is perfectly correct to say things like 'I have a sensation of floating', or 'He has a toothache'.¹¹ And these sentences are not about behavior:

'But was I when a baby taught that "toothache" meant my expression of toothache?' – I was taught that a certain *behavior* was called *expression* of toothache. (*NFL* 293, emphasis added)

In these behavioral circumstances, one will properly say 'He has a toothache'; for Wittgenstein, this is a brute fact, and there are no residual questions about an entity referred to by 'toothache'.

On the interpretation that I have offered thus far, Wittgenstein's philosophical approach appears to be essentially destructive. He is clearly sympathetic to the urges which have produced traditional philosophy, but he regards them as springing from misconceptions deeply rooted in language. This is a *radical* view, but here it is easy to misconstrue Wittgenstein, and to think that he is putting forth something like a traditional theory of mind. D. M. Armstrong, for example, regards Wittgenstein as a behaviorist, and it is very instructive to see how he reaches this interpretation. After quoting *PI* 580 ('An "inner process" stands in need of outward criteria') Armstrong writes:

When Wittgenstein speaks of 'outward criteria' he means bodily behaviour. The phrase 'inner process' refers to mental happenings of the sort that, *prima facie*, seem quite different from bodily behaviour: such things as thoughts and sensations. In saying that 'inner processes' stand in need of outward criteria Wittgenstein seems to be saying that there is a logically necessary connection between the former and the latter. But if this is so, Wittgenstein seems committed either to asserting the existence of a logically necessary connection between 'distinct existences', which seems an implausible interpretation of his view, or else to saying that 'inner processes' are not really anything distinct from bodily behaviour, although there may be two different ways of talking about what men do. But this is a form of Behaviourism.¹²

Armstrong's assumption is the following: either Wittgenstein believed that sensations consist in something inner, or he believed that they consist in something outer. But here Armstrong seems to be 'tricked' by the law of excluded middle – something that Wittgenstein cautioned against (cf. *PI* 352). The truth is that Wittgenstein embraced neither of Armstrong's alternatives. Instead, he wanted ultimately to *dismiss* the question 'are sensations inner processes or are they just outward behavior?' For the question itself forces our thinking into the wrong mold (cf. *PI* 308 on mental processes and behaviorism).

Alan Donagan¹³ gives an interpretation of Wittgenstein quite different from Armstrong's, but he too is (mis)guided by the question 'Do sensations consist in inner processes or are they just outer behavior?'. Failing to realize that Wittgenstein rejected this question, Donagan attempts to provide Wittgenstein's answer to it. He correctly notes (pp. 335–336) that Wittgenstein did not endorse a dispositional analysis of sensation, but he then proceeds to the conclusion that

... a sensation is defined by reference to its external circumstances. Yet it is not, according to Wittgenstein, reducible to those external circumstances; for *it is defined as their private and non-dispositional accompaniment*. It follows that you and I correctly say that we have the same sensation, say toothache, if we both have something frightful that we would naturally express by holding and rubbing our jaws, by certain kinds of grimace, and the like. Whether the internal character of what is expressed in these ways is the same for you as for me is irrelevant to the meaning of the word 'toothache.' (p. 348, emphasis added)

In other words, sensations are the inner objects to which sensation words in fact refer, although the nature of the inner object is irrelevant to determining the meaning of sensation words (cf. p. 345) – a suggestion which Wittgenstein explicitly *rejects* in *PI* 273–274. Donagan's account actually amounts to a 'beetle-box' view of sensation, with the stipulation that the beetle-box is not empty (cf. p. 347).

Underlying Donagan's interpretation is the same assumption that Armstrong made: either Wittgenstein believed that sensations consist in something inner, or he believed that they consist in something outer. Indeed, all traditional attempts to elucidate the 'nature of sensation' are committed to that assumption. But Wittgenstein's point is that traditional philosophy goes astray when it casts about for referents of sensation terms; instead, the emphasis should be upon the various language-games involving the expression-of-sensation. These games, of course, can be described, but once this is accomplished, there is

nothing further about sensation which can be said.

Although my discussion so far has concentrated on Wittgenstein's rejection of a traditional view of sensation, there are nonetheless many positive suggestions to be found in his writings as well. In the next section I shall focus on Wittgenstein's conception of the way in which sensation sentences get their foothold.

2. EXPRESSIONS-OF-SENSATION AND 'SEEING-AS'

One cannot find in the *Philosophical Investigations* any real theory of language acquisition. Although there might be an inclination to regard *PI* 244 as containing such a theory, at least in embryonic form, I have argued that the main purpose of that passage is a negative one. Nevertheless, *PI* 244 most certainly hints at a view which Wittgenstein did endorse: the use of sensation sentences can only be learned in the context of human behavior (*PI* 257). When as children we stub our toes or skin our knees, we naturally cry out, and we are taught to say things such as 'My knee hurts' or 'There's a pain in my toe'. 'What I do is not, of course, to identify my sensation by criteria: but to repeat an expression. But this is not the *end* of the language-game: it is the beginning' (*PI* 290, cf. *PI* 244). Here, according to Wittgenstein, is where a child begins to learn the use of sensation language. What is learned are the circumstances in which various expressions are correctly used. Learning the use of expressions containing 'pain', however, does not mean learning that the word 'pain' refers to an inner entity. Such a misconstrual, based largely on incorrect grammatical analogies, leads (as we have seen) to the conclusion that sensation language cannot be learned at all. The privacy theorist's 'explanation' of language mastery here contains the seeds of its own destruction.

One can, however, ask what is involved when a child moves from repeating an expression to mastering its use. The answer, Wittgenstein believes, will embrace neither causal hypotheses (the framing of which properly belongs to scientific inquiry) nor logically necessary and sufficient conditions (which in this case do not exist). What can be given is a careful *description* of the relevant phenomena. I shall argue that there are illuminating parallels between Wittgenstein's discussion of how we operate with sensation sentences, and his discussion of the phenomenon 'seeing-as'.

It is essential to my learning the use of first-person sensation

sentences, e.g., pain sentences, that others should regard my primitive, natural pain-behavior as an expression-of-pain. Others teach me to use the expression 'I am in pain' in just those situations where they are prepared to say *to* me 'You are in pain', or *of* me 'He is in pain'. Of course, it does not follow that my mastery of sensation language consists in my learning to apply it to myself on the basis of observing my own behavior (cf. *PI* 357). The point is rather that a behavioral context is required in order for others to teach me how to apply sensation language to myself. And the behavioral context, I want to suggest, is this: In order for me to learn the use of first-person sensation sentences, it is necessary that other people *see* certain of my prelinguistic behavior *as* an expression-of-sensation.

A similar point governs my learning to apply sensation sentences to others: learning the use of second-person and third-person sensation sentences is commensurate with coming to *see* certain behaviors of others *as* expressions-of-sensation. And this is a matter not of inference, but of training.

My proposal is that the capacity for seeing certain behavior as an expression-of-sensation is inseparable from linguistic capacity. As Wittgenstein points out, *underlying* these capacities is a 'primitive' or 'prelinguistic' reaction (*Z* 541): e.g., 'to tend, to treat, the part that hurts when someone else is in pain; and not merely when oneself is – and so to pay attention to other people's pain-behaviour, as one does *not* pay attention to one's own pain-behaviour' (*Z* 540). This sort of primitive behavior might well be exemplified by a dog who licks the wounds of his whimpering mate. But it would be incorrect in such a case to say that the dog *sees* his mate's behavior *as* an expression-of-pain, though perhaps he does see it as an expression-of-distress. And if one says that a dog could tend to the wounds of his mate *only* if he saw his mate's behavior as expressive-of-pain, one would simply be making a 'metaphysical' hypothesis.

No doubt some clarification is needed here, since it may seem quite arbitrary to aver that a dog might see his mate's behavior as an expression-of-distress, but not as an expression-of-pain. This claim, however, is perfectly in line with Wittgenstein's idea that 'seeing-as' is not a 'purely sensory' phenomenon, but involves some conceptual mastery as well. (It does seem self-contradictory to say 'A sees X as Y, but A does not have any concept of Y'.) Now, although philosophers sometimes equate mastery of concepts with mastery of language, this

assimilation is not made by Wittgenstein. Nonetheless, he does suggest that absence of language capability places severe constraints on a conceptual repertoire (cf. Z 520). The point is brought out in *PI* 174 through a contrast between a dog's believing that his master is at the door, and his believing that his master will come tomorrow. In the absence of language, there is simply not enough complexity in behavior to credit anyone with the latter belief.

What behavior is required for ascribing to someone the concept of pain? Presumably, one would have to be able to indicate that pain is a sensation (not a number or a physical object), that expressions-of-pain differ in sometimes subtle ways from expressions-of-sorrow (Z 492), that pains can vary greatly in intensity, etc. Of course, someone struck with total paralysis while retaining consciousness may not be able to evidence knowledge of such distinctions, but his claim to the concept of pain then rests on his former demarcating abilities. And these are abilities which no dog possesses; once again, the required distinctions are not available outside of a linguistic framework. So, if 'seeing-as' requires conceptual mastery, any constraints on the relevant concepts in an individual's repertoire will equally be constraints on his 'seeing-as' abilities:

In the triangle I can see now *this* as apex, *that* as base – now *this* as apex, *that* as base. – Clearly the words 'Now I am seeing *this* as the apex' cannot so far mean anything to a learner who has only just met the concepts of apex, base, and so on. – But I do not mean this as an empirical proposition.

'Now he's seeing it like *this*', 'now like *that*' would only be said of someone *capable* of making certain applications of the figure quite freely.

The substratum of this experience is the mastery of a technique. (*PI* p.208)

What is the 'experience' referred to here? Wittgenstein says that "Seeing as. . ." is not part of perception' (*PI* p.197), and also that this concept "has *more* than purely visual reference" (*PI* p.209). It does not follow from either of these claims, however, that perception is not part of 'seeing-as'; the latter claim suggests just the opposite. Although formulas make for a risky approach to interpreting Wittgenstein, the following may be helpful: to see *X* as *Y* is *at least* to see *X*, and to make an appropriate connection between *X* and something of type *Y*. What constitutes an 'appropriate connection' will vary with the circumstances. On some occasions it may consist in believing the *X* to be a *Y*; such is often the case when hunting accidents occur. On the other hand, one may have no erroneous beliefs about the perceptual situation: a

person familiar with Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit figure, and who can see it either as a duck or a rabbit, might make the appropriate connection by being able to subsume the elongated appendage under the concept 'ear', and again under the concept 'bill'. Both of these examples emphasize Wittgenstein's point that in order for *A* to see *X* as *Y*, *A* must have the concept of *Y*. Notice, however, that *A* is not similarly required to have the concept of *X*. Since there is a *de re* reading of '*A* sees *X*' in '*A* sees *X* as *Y*' – namely, 'The thing which is in fact *X* is something which *A* sees as a *Y*' – we may rest assured that atavists can see computers as totems.

I have suggested that the acquisition of sensation language is closely tied to seeing behavior as expressive-of-sensation. Assuming that this is correct, a fuller account of 'seeing-as' becomes imperative. Consider the following drawing (cf. *BB* 162–163, *PI* p.194):



Fig. 1.

It is natural to describe this as a face. But if someone wants to emphasize that his experience of Figure 1 is something more than an experience of seeing marks on paper, e.g.,

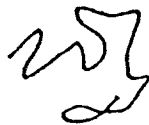


Fig. 2.

he might well say: 'I see the lines in Figure 1 as a face'. Now, there are several important points to be made here. First, the superficial grammar of expressions of the form '*A* sees *X* as *Y*' is misleading, for it wrongly suggests that somehow two objects (*X* and *Y*) are involved in *A*'s experience – e.g., that 'seeing lines as a face' involves a visual comparison between a group of lines and an image of a human face (cf. *BB* 164, *PI* 604–605). But this way of putting the matter does not

correctly describe one's experience of Figure 1. The reason is that the words 'I see the lines in Figure 1 as a face' got their significance in our discussion through the introduction of Figure 2; thus, their purpose is not to describe some 'intrinsic feature' of the experience one gets in looking at Figure 1, but rather to *distinguish* that experience from the experience one gets in looking at Figure 2.¹⁴

In circumstances where no contrastive use is made of 'I see *X* as *Y*', the 'seeing-as' terminology is out of place. For example, consider Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit picture (*PI* p.194) and suppose that you have never noticed its double aspect; suppose that when shown the picture you always say that it is a rabbit.

I should not have answered the question 'What do you see here?' by saying: 'Now I am seeing it as a picture-rabbit'. I should simply have described my perception: Just as if I had said 'I see a red circle over there' –

Nevertheless someone else could have said of me: 'He is seeing the figure as a picture-rabbit.' (*PI* pp. 194–195)

Here, the third-person use of 'seeing-as' is taken to be legitimate because there is a contrast which the *speaker* intends to make; *he* sees the double aspect of the duck-rabbit, whereas the other viewer does not (cf. *Z* 208).

Given that the 'seeing-as' terminology is essentially contrastive,¹⁵ how am I to describe my perception of Figure 1 in those cases where no contrasts are intended? The answer, already suggested in the last quotation, will no doubt seem disappointing: *My perception is described by my description of what I see* (cf. *NFL* 308, *PI* p. 195). This may sound like a truism, but it can still be misunderstood. Perceptual descriptions need not be (and rarely are) self-conscious introspective reports. They need not even involve any psychological terms. Wittgenstein once imagined a language-game in which people describe what they see, but without using the prefix 'I see'. He then asked: Could anybody say that what I call out is incomplete because I have left out to mention the person?!' (*NFL* 298). The intended answer is clearly negative. For, a person who looks at Figure 1 and says 'There is a face' has provided a description of his perception (we know from it what Figure 1 looked like to him), the absence of psychological terms notwithstanding.¹⁶

The discussion can now be applied to our use of sensation language. I have suggested that for Wittgenstein, learning to apply sensation language to others goes hand in hand with coming to see the behavior of others as expressive-of-sensation; and that learning to apply it to

oneself requires that others see some of one's (prelinguistic) behavior as expressive-of-sensation. Thus, there are important similarities between

- (1) A sees *B*'s [pain] behavior as an expression-of-pain;
- (2) A sees Figure 1 as a face.

They involve (respectively) mastery of the concept of pain, and mastery of the concept of a face. In most situations, of course, a person would not describe his own perceptions by using the 'seeing-as' terminology. Rather, he would be expected to say:

- (1') *B* is in pain;
- (2') This is a face.

It is also true that an observer would not normally describe *A*'s situation using the terminology of 'seeing-as': just as I would not normally say 'I see this knife and fork as a knife and fork' (*PI* p.195), I would not normally say 'A sees *B*'s behavior as an expression-of-pain'. But what then is the point of (1) and (2)? The answer is that they have a use if some *contrast* is intended. And the contrast I have been stressing vis-à-vis (1) is between a prelinguistic phase where certain 'seeing-as' attributions fail to apply, and a linguistic phase where they do apply.¹⁷ Here, incidentally, a difference between (1) and (2) also emerges: the conceptual mastery associated with (1) is language-bound, while that associated with (2) is not.

Although the conceptual skills embodied in language represent an important component of seeing behavior as an expression-of-sensation, Wittgenstein also stresses a nonlinguistic component. There is often an immediacy about seeing-as, which a focus on the side of conceptual mastery may tend to obscure:

Suppose I said: 'It is not enough to perceive the threatening face, I have to interpret it.'
 - Someone whips out a knife at me and I say 'I conceive that as a threat.' (*Z* 218)

In making this joke Wittgenstein does not mean, of course, that looks or behavior can never be interpreted, or that they are always unambiguous. His point is that in fact it is frequently the case that no interpretation occurs (or is needed). And this is true despite the fact that the way in which we see human behavior is a function of the *context* in which it takes place. An upturned mouth may be seen as a smile, an imitation of someone else's smile, a contemptuous expression, etc. (cf. *PI* 539). But it does not follow from this that seeing someone's

expression as a smile involves any interpretation – even though someone may subsequently explain why he said ‘A smiled’ rather than ‘A imitated B’s smile’.¹⁸

I have argued that there are some important parallels between Wittgenstein’s account of seeing-as attributions, and his discussion of language learning and language mastery. The two themes are inseparable in some important respects, but I have not meant to suggest that one is somehow more fundamental than the other. Without a capacity for seeing-as, there could be no mastery of language (psychological language being the main concern here), but equally, for a creature devoid of language, many seeing-as attributions would not be credible.

The foregoing discussion quite obviously has not attempted to catalogue the large variety of ways in which sensation language operates. Clearly, a sentence like ‘He is in pain’ may perform many different functions: it could be used to *display* concern; *inform* a physician that the anesthetic has failed to work; *warn* someone that the dinner plates are hot; *induce* a bystander to assist the victim of an accident; *prevent* an attempt at first-aid by an incompetent amateur, etc. Furthermore, there are some major differences between the operation of first-person and third-person sensation sentences. In ignoring these facts I have not meant to imply that they are insignificant. Rather, my argument has had the more limited objective of showing that, for Wittgenstein, inasmuch as these facts are facts about sensation *language*, they are inseparable from the ability to see certain behavior as an expression-of-sensation.¹⁹

NOTES

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘Notes for Lectures on “Private Experience” and “Sense Data”’ (*NFL*), by Rush Rhees (ed.), *The Philosophical Review*, 77, 1968, 271–320. The quotation is from p. 291.

² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations (PI)*, by G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), Macmillan, New York, 1953. Reference will be made to section numbers from Part I and to page numbers from Part II.

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* 2nd ed., (*BB*) Harper & Row, New York, 1964, p.143.

⁴ Cf. L. C. Holborow, ‘Wittgenstein’s Kind of Behaviourism?’ *Philosophical Quarterly* 17, 1967, 345–357, esp. pp. 347–348, and Stewart Candlish, ‘The Real Private Language Argument’, *Philosophy* 55, 1980, esp. p. 91. Anthony Kenny (*Wittgenstein* Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, 1976, Ch. 10) and P. M. S. Hacker (*Insight and Illusion*, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, 1972, Ch. VIII) underestimate the role which Wittgenstein’s remarks on

ostensive definition play in his private language argument. No doubt this is because they are concerned to accommodate Wittgenstein's view (*BB* 12) that language could be innate. Thus, they view Wittgenstein's criticism of private concept possession as separable from his criticism of private concept acquisition. Kenny and Hacker may be correct in thinking that a Wittgensteinian inspired 'inherited private language' argument can be developed, but such an argument is not Wittgenstein's concern in *PI*. For a detailed criticism of Kenny on this point, see Candlish, esp. pp. 90–92.

⁵ Although A. J. Ayer recognizes that this problem is parallel for private and public ostensive definition, he wrongly concludes: 'Whatever it is about my behaviour that transforms the making of a sound, or the inscription of a shape, into the employment of a sign can equally well occur in either case.' This overlooks the role that human agreement plays in establishing consistent usage, a necessary condition of something's being a name. See Ayer's 'Can There Be a Private Language?', repr. in George Pitcher (ed.), *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, Doubleday, Garden City, 1966, p. 257.

⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (*Z*), G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), Univ. of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970, Sect. 430 (emphasis added).

⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (eds.), Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (trans.), New York and London, 1969, Sect. 475. Cf. *Z* 391 and 545.

⁸ This appears to leave open the possibility that, for Wittgenstein, sensations might in some sense be private, although sensation-language is public (sensations might be items to which each of us has privileged access). Such a view has recently been argued for in a series of papers by Jaakko and Merrill Hintikka. Their thesis is that the later Wittgenstein believed sensations to be the private referents of (public) sensation language, and that sensation language achieves its reference to sensation through (public) language-games. On this interpretation (which will be seen to differ from mine), Wittgenstein's criticisms are aimed at Cartesian semantics, not Cartesian metaphysics. See Jaakko Hintikka, 'Language-Games' in Jaakko Hintikka et al. (eds.), *Essays on Wittgenstein in Honour of G. H. von Wright* Acta Philosophica Fennica, vol. 28, nos. 1–3; North-Holland, Amsterdam, 1976, pp. 105–125; Merrill Provenance and Jaakko Hintikka, 'Wittgenstein on Privacy and Publicity', in *Wittgenstein and His Impact on Contemporary Thought, Proceedings of the Second International Wittgenstein Symposium*, Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, Wien, 1978, pp. 353–362; Merrill B. Hintikka and Jaakko Hintikka, 'Different Language-Games in Wittgenstein', in *Language, Logic, and Philosophy, Proceedings of the Fourth International Wittgenstein Symposium*, Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, Wien, 1980, pp. 417–422.

⁹ I do not mean to suggest that Wittgenstein never commits himself to a view about how sensation language functions. My present point, however, is that *PI* 244 is the wrong place to look – *pace* George Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1964, p. 301; Godfrey Vesey, 'Other Minds', in Godfrey Vesey (ed.), *Understanding Wittgenstein*, Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca, 1974, pp. 155–156; and Robert J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Henley and Boston, 1976, pp. 156–157. Norman Malcolm's view of *PI* 244 is harder to circumscribe. He writes: 'Wittgenstein says that the verbal expressions of sensation can take the place of the non-verbal expressions and that in learning the former one learns "new pain-behavior".' See his essay 'Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*', repr. in Pitcher, p. 80.

However, Malcolm goes on to interpret this as the claim that Wittgenstein is 'drawing our attention to an *analogy* between the groan of pain and the utterance of [pain sentences]' (Ibid.). But then we need to ask what the *purpose* of the analogy is. Malcolm sees it as an attempt to point out the 'in corrigibility' of first-person pain reports (pp. 80–81). Now, I think that Wittgenstein did hold an 'in corrigibility' view like the one Malcolm attributes to him (cf. *PI* 246), but the expression of that view is not what Wittgenstein intends in *PI* 244. There, his intention is to destroy the name/object picture of sensation. In regard to this whole question, it is interesting to take note of *NFL*, where the 'analogy' between moaning and verbal expressions is again used for the purpose of countering a false picture. See *NFL* 295, and esp. *NFL* 301n, where the editor quotes from Wittgenstein's actual lectures: 'Of course "toothache" is not only a substitute for moaning – but it is *also* a substitute for moaning: *and to say this shows how utterly different it is from a word like "Watson"*' (final emphasis added). This illustrates Wittgenstein's use of the 'analogy'.

¹⁰ I borrow this notation from D. C. Dennett, *Content and Consciousness*, Humanities Press, London, 1969, Ch. I. Dennett's treatment of the term 'sensation' is in some respects similar to the view that I attribute to Wittgenstein; cf. Ch. IV of *Content and Consciousness*, esp. pp. 93–96.

¹¹ 'We say, "surely the thought is *something*; it is not nothing"; and all one can answer to this is, that the word "thought" has its *use*, which is of a totally different kind from the use of the word "sentence"' (*BB* 7, cf. *PI* 370, 371). John W. Cook puts Wittgenstein's view by saying that sensations are 'states of a living organism'. This is innocuous if it means: 'Only when confronted with human (or human-like) behavior is it correct to say "This being has sensations"'. But Cook does not clearly spell out what he means by 'states of a living organism'; the expression is misleading insofar as it invites the question 'What *kind* of states are these?', for here the debate between Cartesians and behaviorists resurfaces. See Cook's essay, 'Human Beings', in Peter Winch (ed.), *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, Humanities Press, London, 1969, esp. p. 145.

¹² D. M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*, New York and London, 1968, p. 55.

¹³ 'Wittgenstein on Sensation', in Pitcher, pp. 324–351.

¹⁴ In commenting on an analogous situation, Wittgenstein writes: 'Instead of asking the question "Where is this constant experience which seems to go on all through my reading?", we should ask "What is it in saying 'A particular atmosphere enshrouds the words which I am reading', *that I am contrasting this case with?*"' (*BB* 169, emphasis added).

¹⁵ P. F. Strawson calls the contrastive use an 'unimportant sense' of 'seeing-as'. He offers no argument for this claim, however; I have tried to show that it is mistaken. See Strawson's 'Review of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*', repr. in Pitcher, p.60.

¹⁶ One might say, following G. E. M. Anscombe, that the sentence 'I see this face' gives an *intentional object*: 'An intentional object is given by a word or phrase which gives a *description under which*' – i.e., a description one would assent to as a description of what one was experiencing or doing. In cases of seeing which involve a material object, the intentional object would be what one *sees* the material object *as*. See Anscombe's 'The Intentionality of Sensation: A Grammatical Feature', in R. J. Butler (ed.), *Analytical Philosophy*, Second Series, Oxford, 1965, pp. 158–180. The quotation is from p. 166.

¹⁷ The contrast could be brought in other ways as well, e.g., between (i) 'Now the child sees human behavior as an expression-of-pain'; (ii) 'Earlier, the child saw such behavior

only as the motion of a thing'. Cook, ('Human Beings') rejects this type of contrast, but his argument depends upon assimilating (ii) to (ii') 'Earlier, the child saw human beings as machines'. But (ii') clearly represents a capacity of a higher order than (ii); thus, even if (as Cook maintains) (ii') requires language mastery, it cannot be concluded from this that (ii) does.

¹⁸ For a parallel observation on the topic of meaning, see *BB* 39.

¹⁹ An earlier version of Part II of this essay was read at the Western Division meetings of the American Philosophical Association, April, 1979. I am indebted to many people for valuable criticisms and suggestions, but I owe special thanks to Donald Gustafson, Jaakko Hintikka, and Norman Malcolm. I also gratefully acknowledge the following institutional support for my research: The National Endowment for the Humanities, for a summer stipend; The University of Michigan-Flint, for a sabbatical leave; and The University of Cincinnati, for a Charles Phelps Taft Postdoctoral Fellowship.

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