

### **Explain Wittgenstein's attack on the notion of a logically private language**

Wittgenstein outlines two problems for the existence of other minds and the impossibility of a logically private language.

Wittgenstein's major attack is on the Cartesian idea that meanings of words and mental states have the capability of being logically private. If he succeeded in doing so, he completely irradiates any presupposition raised by Cartesians. Descartes believed in solipsism, namely one can never be sure of the existence of others. One merely forms a conception of one's own mental state. The Cartesian further argues for the view that I and my mental state exist, and exist only ('I think, therefore I am'); the person is merely using their own logically private language to formulate such sceptical doubt.

Yet Wittgenstein attacks this. He states that it is illogical to claim that one can talk about the mind, solely from a private first person perspective. Thus, the person is unable to acquire and use general terms and concepts that are used to classify and describe the mind. In other words, one cannot talk about one's own mind. This creates the assumption that a person can speak a language only they can understand, in the logical private state of their own mind.

He goes on to say that, first person ascriptions are only able to take place because; a private language has been acquired by associating such a language with the mental states of other people, in a public social context. For the words to have acquired their meaning in the first place there must be a public world for the words to have acquired their meaning in the first place. It does not make sense to suppose that such a language is learnt and applied in the logical privacy of one's own mind.

Secondly, Wittgenstein attacks the notion of private ostensive definition. Private ostensive definition is defined as a logically private inner pointing, that essentially bestows words with their meanings. For example, if someone was to ask me what the colour purple was, I would point at the colour (if was in sight) whether it be in an object, or the colour on the walls and hope the person will eventually come to understand the meaning of the word/concept. Ostensive definition is an action that takes place in the public world, as the aim of doing such an act is so that others can see it.

However, according to Cartesianism the act of ostensive definition must take place in the logically private, solitary mind of the individual. Mental states such as an itch, a non linguistic state, which is supposed to be solitary and private (in the mind of the individual), surely the problem arises in that it

seems difficult for a name to be acquired for my state of mind, if no one can see what I mean when I say 'itch', if all I do in reaction to such a mental state is point to where the itch is.

Hence, I end up creating a language through ostensive definition that only I can understand, but consequently others cannot.

Wittgenstein attacks this idea. He states illustrates an idea where someone is supposed to give ostensive definition of a certain word. In this case, I shall use the word 'runciple'. If I asked me to show them what 'runciple' meant, and I pointed at a table, surely that can be interpreted in many ways, i.e. hard, wooden, solid, 'runciple' etc. Of course, someone is bound to ask which one you mean, but in order to understand the answer or ask the question in the first place, one must fundamentally have an acquired language.

Wittgenstein does not want to make the assumption that the person must have an established language. He forth and foremost wants to find the foundations to the concept, how a person knows that purple means the colour of an object and not a shape of an object.

It further seems difficult to understand how ostensive definition works. Ultimately, the fundamental question Wittgenstein attempts to raise at this point is how the meaning of the word 'purple' or 'red' or 'round' or 'tall' are established. If ostensive definition is logically private, how can others understand what I mean when I point to an object? Wittgenstein suggests it is because of shared activities in a public social world/third person perspective. He points out that ostensive definition takes place in a public setting. Through the great range of things you may do in the weave of life of this world, is where meanings of words are established. Hence, why when I point to a picture and comment on the use of blue used in it, you know I am talking about the colour and colour only.

In addition, Wittgenstein presupposes that all concepts have a background of 'customs and activities'. Namely, the place for gaining an understanding of an unfamiliar object is already prepared; Wittgenstein describes this as 'stage-setting'. He uses the example of a chess king. He asks you to imagine a person who does not know what a chess king is. It may seem obvious to use ostensive definition, but suppose that person has never seen or played any game at all (not just chess). If you were to tell him what a chess piece was, it would mean nothing at all. In saying that, if he has a background of learning or watching simple board games taking place, if you were to pick up and chess king and show him all of the moves it can make, he will eventually understand its use. This is because, as Wittgenstein calls 'stage-setting'. From this, any understanding for unfamiliar games can be build other upon. This

does not work for the Cartesian who is constraint to the limitations of his own mind.

In addition, private ostensive definition allows one to fix a meaning of a word. Once the meaning is fixed, it can be used again and again to talk about the word in question. ▲ sort of dictionary is constructed in a person's mind, where a term is allocated and given a name or meaning. When I have to say that term or word again, I go to the dictionary and find the place where the term is allocated and find the meaning.

Wittgenstein points that out that whatever the term/word stands for, has to be remembered correctly, otherwise the term/word will be used wrongly. However, Wittgenstein points out that such distinction requires one to branch out the private world of the mind. Whatever I think to be right, would be right and I would have to remember correctly the allocation of the term/word i.e. pain or the sensation I would be feeling at the time, cold consequently be wrong. However, according to the Cartesian, all ostensive definition takes place in the mind. Yet, if this is so I would not be able to check whether the word I am using to describe a certain sensation is right; as I am restricted to the private world of my mind. Hence, without the possibility of doing such a thing, defining a word by private ostensive definition fails.

Further, the Cartesian methods of doubt cannot even begin. For the question to even formulate a language must be formed in the existence of a public social context that Descartes cannot reach.